

# Hegel's Ontology of Power

The Structure of Social Domination  
in Capitalism

Arash Abazari



## HEGEL'S ONTOLOGY OF POWER

Recent attempts to revitalize Hegel's social and political philosophy have tended to be doubly constrained: firstly, by their focus on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*; and secondly, by their broadly liberal interpretive framework. Challenging that trend, Arash Abazari shows that the locus of Hegel's genuine critical social theory is to be sought in his ontology – specifically in the “logic of essence” of the *Science of Logic*. Mobilizing ideas from Marx and Adorno, Abazari unveils the hidden critical import of Hegel's logic. He argues that social domination in capitalism obtains by virtue of the illusion of equality and freedom; shows how relations of opposition underlie the seeming pluralism in capitalism; and elaborates on the deepest ground of domination, i.e., the totality of capitalist social relations. Overall, his book demonstrates that Hegel's logic can and should be read politically.

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Institute for Research in Fundamental Sciences (IPM)*



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We had all the words of the world  
And did not say  
That which mattered  
Since, there was only one word, one word that was missing:  
Freedom!

Ahmad Shamlou



*For Mitra*





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## *Note on Abbreviations and Citations*

I have occasionally modified the translations in order to make them more precise, or more appropriate to the context of my discussion.

### **Hegel**

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden* (WW), Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986. Cited either by page number or section number. In the latter case, if the citation is from the Addition, the section number is followed by Z.

WL I & II, SL	<i>Wissenschaft der Logik</i> [ <i>Science of Logic</i> , trans. A. V. Miller, New York: Humanities Press, 1969]
EL	<i>Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I. Erster Teil. Die Wissenschaft der Logik</i> [ <i>Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part I, Science of Logic</i> , trans. K. Brinkmann and D. Dahlstrom, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010]
PR	<i>Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts</i> [ <i>Elements of the Philosophy of Right</i> , trans. H. Nisbet, ed. A. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991]
PhG	<i>Phänomenologie des Geistes</i> [ <i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i> , trans. T. Pinkard, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018]
EN	<i>Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften. Zweiter Teil. Die</i>

- Naturphilosophie*. [*The Philosophy of Nature: Being Part Two of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. D. Miller, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004]
- EG *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften. Dritter Teil. Die Philosophie des Geistes* [*The Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller, revisions M. J. Inwood, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007]
- WW 2 *Jenaer Schriften 1801–1807*
- WW 4 *Nürnberger und Heidelberger Schriften 1808–1817* [*Heidelberg Writings: Journal Publications*, trans. Brady Bowman and Allen Speight, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; *The Philosophical Propaedeutic*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986]
- WW 12, LPH *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* [*The Philosophy of World History*, trans. John Sibree, 1956 [1857], New York: Dover]
- WW 17, PEG *Vorlesungen über die Beweise vom Dasein Gottes* [*Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*, trans. Peter C. Hodgson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007]
- WW 18–20, LHP I–III *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I–III* [*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and Frances H. Simon, London: Kegan Paul Publishers (1895), reprint Thoemmes Press, 1999]
- GW Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Gesammelte Werke*, Hamburg: Meiner, 1968ff
- V Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Manuskripte und Nachschriften*, Hamburg: Meiner, 1983ff

### Marx and Engels

Marx, Karl, and Engels, Friedrich, *Marx–Engels Werke* (MEW), Berlin: Dietz, 1960ff. Cited by page number. The translations of the three volumes of *Capital*, the *Grundrisse*, and the *Results* are from the Penguin edition. The other translations are from *Marx–Engels Collected Works* (MECW), New York: International Publishers, 1975ff.

MEW 23, C I	<i>Das Kapital: Band I</i> [ <i>Capital: Volume One</i> , trans. B. Fowkes, London: Penguin, 1976]
MEW 24, C II	<i>Das Kapital: Band II</i> [ <i>Capital: Volume Two</i> , trans. D. Fernbach, London: Penguin, 1978]
MEW 25, C III	<i>Das Kapital: Band III</i> [ <i>Capital: Volume Three</i> , trans. D. Fernbach, London: Penguin, 1981]
MEW 42, G	<i>Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie</i> [ <i>Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy</i> , trans. M. Nicolaus, London: Penguin, 1973]
MEW 1, MECW 3	<i>Zur Kritik des Hegelschen Staatsrechts</i> [ <i>Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State</i> ]; <i>Umriss zu einer Kritik der Nationalökonomie</i> [ <i>Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy</i> ] (Engels)
MEW 2, MECW 2	<i>Die heilige Familie</i> [ <i>The Holy Family</i> ] (Marx and Engels)
MEW 3, MECW 5	<i>Die deutsche Ideologie</i> [ <i>The German Ideology</i> ] (Marx and Engels)
MEW 4, MECW 6	<i>Das Elend der Philosophie</i> [ <i>The Poverty of Philosophy</i> ]; <i>Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei</i> [ <i>Manifesto of the Communist Party</i> ] (Marx and Engels)
MEW 13, MECW 29	<i>Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie</i> [ <i>A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy</i> ]



MEW 19, MECW 24	“Kritik des Gothaer Programms” [ <i>Critique of the Gotha Program</i> ]
MEW 20, MECW 25	<i>Anti-Dühring; Dialektik der Natur</i> [ <i>Dialectics of Nature</i> ] (Engels)
MEW 21, MECW 26	<i>Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats</i> [ <i>The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State</i> ] (Engels)
MEW 26.1–3, MECW 31–33	<i>Theorien über den Mehrwert I–III</i> [ <i>Theories of Surplus Value I–III</i> ]
MEW 40, MECW 3	<i>Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844</i> [ <i>Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844</i> ]; <i>Auszüge aus James Mill</i> [ <i>Commens on James Mill</i> ]

#### Results, Resultate

Marx, Karl. “Resultate des Unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses,” Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 2009 [“Results of the Immediate Process of Production” in *Capital: Volume One*, trans. B. Fowkes, London: Penguin, 1976, Appendix, pp. 943ff].

### Adorno

Adorno, Theodor, *Gesammelte Schriften in zwanzig Bänden* (GS), Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997. Cited by page number.

- GS 4 *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* [*Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, London: Verso, 1978]
- GS 5 *Drei Studien zu Hegel* [*Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993]
- GS 6 *Negative Dialektik* [*Negative Dialectics*, trans. Dennis Redmond, accessed at [www.academia.edu/39707967/Negative\\_Dialectics](http://www.academia.edu/39707967/Negative_Dialectics)]
- GS 8 *Soziologische Schriften I* [PD (see below) “Society,” trans. Fredrick Jameson, *Salmagundi*, 1970: 144–53]

Adorno, Theodor, *Nachgelassene Schriften, Abteilung IV, Vorlesungen* (NS-V), Frankfurt: Suhrkamp. Cited by page number.

- NS-V 2 *Einführung in die Dialektik* (1958)  
 NS-V 6 *Philosophie und Soziologie* (1960)  
 NS-V 12 *Philosophische Elemente einer Theorie der Gesellschaft* (1964/65) [*Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society*, trans. Wieland Hoban, Cambridge: Polity, 2019]  
 NS-V 13, HF *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit* (1964/65) [*History and Freedom: Lectures 1964–1965*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006]  
 NS-V 14 *Metaphysik: Begriff und Probleme* (1965)  
 NS-V 15 *Einleitung in die Soziologie* (1968)  
 NS-V 16 *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik. Fragmente zur Vorlesung* (1965/66) [*Lectures on Negative Dialectics: Fragments of a Lecture Course 1965/1966*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008]  
 PD Adorno, Theodor, Popper, Karl, Dahrendorf, Ralph, Habermas, Jürgen, and Albert, Hans, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby, London: Heinemann, 1976.

### Lukács

Lukács, Georg, *Werke* (GLW), Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1984. Cited by page number.

- GLW 2 *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* [*History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971]  
 GLW 11 *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen, I. Halbband*  
 GLW 13 & 14 *Prolegomena zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins (I & II)*

### Spinoza

- E Spinoza Baruch, *Ethics*, trans. G. H. R. Parkinson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, cited in the following order: book number,

d (definition), a (axiom), p (proposition), s (scholium), app (appendix).

### **Kant**

KdrV     Kant, Immanuel, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974 [*Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer and A. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], cited according to the pagination of the Akademie Ausgabe.

## *Introduction*

Even Hegel's most abstract and metaphysical concepts are saturated with experience. (Marcuse 1960: vii)

There is no single element or relation in the logic that cannot be ultimately referred back to elements and relations of the actual world, and does not ultimately have to be so referred. (Lukács GLW 13: 504, 1978: 48)

### **I Reading the Logic as a Social Theory**

Hegel's official work in social and political philosophy, the *Philosophy of Right*, is arguably a text aimed at the justification and legitimation of the bourgeois-capitalist social order, of what he calls "modernity" [Neuzeit]. The project of the book, as he avers in the Preface, is to "recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present." That is, Hegel seeks to show that, despite undeniable problems, modern society is inherently rational. By demonstrating the rationality of modernity, Hegel expects his readers, who might feel alienated from their society, to find "reconciliation" with it and thus to "delight in the present." The main concept of the *Philosophy of Right* is freedom, and Hegel seeks to show how freedom permeates the major institutions of modern society. The modern legal code, the bourgeois individualist morality, the nuclear family, the market, and the representative state are all ways of giving concrete expression to different aspects of freedom, and together constitute a "system of the ethical world," which is, as a whole, rational.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To preempt misunderstanding, some clarification is warranted. The recent scholarship on Hegel universally acknowledges that the old charge, according to which Hegel aims to legitimize his contemporary Prussian state, is simply wrong. Indeed, in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel is not

Hegel lived in an era which was still suffused with enthusiasm for the prospects of the bourgeois-capitalist social order. This enthusiasm, although tamed and not at all romantic, inflects the entirety of his social and political philosophy. Yet historical changes since Hegel's death in 1831 have, I believe, proved that he was wrong. Today, I presume, nobody in earnest can be reconciled or even seek reconciliation with a world of sharp contrasts between gated communities and urban ghettos, where the prospect of any substantive social solidarity seems completely obliterated. The political process, which for Hegel was supposed to be the realm of the "universal," is today heavily determined by the "particular" interests of the financial sector. The mentality appropriate to the market has penetrated almost all areas of social life, and the resultant loss of communal bonds, so it unfortunately seems, can only be compensated by the "false" universality promised by various sorts of virulent nationalism or religious fundamentalism. And beyond this, of course, there is the rapid deterioration of our common habitat, which we observe with a sense of sheer helplessness or cold indifference. It must be conceded that, in light of the historical experience since Hegel's death, the affirmative project of the *Philosophy of Right*, which aims at proving the rationality of the bourgeois-capitalist social order, essentially fails.

The failure of Hegel's project in the *Philosophy of Right* cannot only be ascribed to the fact that it was written in a different world. The failure is conceptual, and mainly has to do with the way Hegel conceives of the economy in capitalism. It is true that Hegel clearly saw important problems that the capitalist economy engenders. Namely, he acknowledges the seemingly unsurpassable gap between the rich and the poor in modern society (PR §185); shows how a group of people, through extreme poverty and continuous unemployment, are degraded to the status of the "rabble" (PR §244, §245); and even touches on the economic necessity of imperialism under capitalism (PR §248). Nonetheless, he thought that these problems, disturbing as they are, remain marginal, and ultimately do not threaten the rationality of the basic structure of modern society as a whole.

A thoroughgoing critique of Hegel's view on the economy under capitalism would require another book.<sup>2</sup> Here I mention only what I think constitutes two main pitfalls of Hegel's account. Hegel correctly saw the

primarily concerned with everyday politics. His aim is much broader. Namely, he intends to demonstrate the legitimacy of the modern social order, regardless of its immediate empirical manifestations.

<sup>2</sup> The best exposition and critique of Hegel's economic views remains Lukács (1975 [1948]: 319–420). Lukács shows how Hegel's economic views influence his philosophy in general, and how the

major spheres of the modern society to consist in the private sphere of family, the social sphere of the market, and the political sphere of the state. He considered these spheres to be, by and large, in harmony with each other, such that the excesses of one can be compensated for by the workings of the others. In particular, he thought that the problems inherent in and produced by the market can, to a large extent, be redressed by the rational intervention of the state. Contrary to Hegel, however, today it is almost self-evident that the economy under capitalism – and most blatantly in its current phase of neoliberalism – is not merely a “moment” of the modern society which can be confined to its proper place. Rather, the economy is so powerful that it infects, and tends to colonize, the entire life-world.<sup>3</sup> In capitalism, to invoke Marx, capital is “a general illumination, which bathes all the other colors and modifies their particularity; it is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being” (MEW 42: 40, G 107). In fact, in the age of the sovereignty of capital, the state which was supposed to regulate the economy is itself regulated by the economy.

Hegel’s second failure lies in his conceptual determination of the economic sphere itself. Hegel divided the economic sphere along the lines of “estates” based on the type of the work that people do: roughly into the agricultural, the commercial, and the administrative estates. He thought that these estates have different functions, and yet that the relation between them is horizontal and devoid of power. Nonetheless, the mechanism of capital proves that in capitalism the type of work that people do is not economically relevant, and that civil society is divided not culturally by “estates” but economically by “classes.” What defines classes, to remind ourselves of Marx’s view, is the structural relation to the means of production. Those who own the means of production constitute the capitalist class, and those who must sell their labor-power to the former constitute the class of wage-laborers. The relation of classes is not horizontal, and cannot in principle be so, but is a vertical relation of power, or more precisely a relation of “opposition.”

shortcomings of the former translate into those of the latter. For a recent, sympathetic, exposition of Hegel’s economic thought, see Herzog (2013).

<sup>3</sup> This is not to claim that *any and all* phenomena of the modern society are determined by capital. It is not a claim that any action in the private realm of the family (say, a birthday gift that a son gives to his mother), or in the public domain of the state (say, a certain speech in the US Congress against war-mongering) must be explained in economic terms. Rather, it is a claim that the basic *structure* of society in capitalism, i.e., its “totality” or “actuality,” is determined by capital; which is to say that the family in capitalism becomes the capitalist nuclear family (as distinct from other forms of family in premodern times), and the state in capitalism effectively functions as a *capitalist* state. For a thorough explanation of why “totality” is not to be construed in terms of allness, see Section 3.2.

Hegel's two major failures – the conception of the capitalist economy as subordinate to politics, and the horizontal differentiation of people in the economic sphere – are conceptually interdependent. Since Hegel thought that the estates are on a par with each other, he concluded that their interests could be equally represented in the political sphere, such that the state would function as the true universal, as that which in fact unites people with each other, and indeed as the realm of “the actuality of concrete freedom” (PR §260). However, if we accept that the economic sphere is constituted by opposition between classes and the power of one class over another, we must concede, with Marx, that the state cannot in principle function as the true universal, but will inevitably be contaminated by the relation of power inherent in the economic sphere. That is to say, the representative liberal democracy in a class-based civil society necessarily fails to be truly representative.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the *Philosophy of Right*, which by and large has an affirmative view of the bourgeois-capitalist social order, cannot ground a genuinely critical social theory.<sup>5</sup> But does that mean that Hegel doesn't have any genuinely critical theory of capitalism? The answer is no. Hegel does have such a critical theory: but that theory is not located in his official social and political philosophy. Rather, as I will show in this book, the locus of

<sup>4</sup> There are two other major pitfalls in the *Philosophy of Right*, which I cannot discuss here, but which I can at least mention. The first is the explicitly “*rechtlich*” or legalistic framework that Hegel espouses in that book. It is true that “abstract right” constitutes a low form of freedom for Hegel; nonetheless, by beginning the book with it, Hegel frames – and thus effectively constrains – his conceptual reconstruction of modern society, and this is true even of his later discussions of social and political life in the “ethical life.” Secondly, in the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel takes a political stance that is against popular democracy. He believes that the affairs of the state must primarily be decided by the so-called universal estate, namely, the government employees and the bureaucracy; which is to say that for him there is not much room left for the actual sovereignty of the people. Hegel's distrust of the people is also clear in his conception of the economic outcast, i.e., the rabble. It is true that he refreshingly castigates the economic system – and not the rabble – for their predicament; nonetheless, he regards the rabble only as a victim of civil society, and not as a potential agent of history. See Lukács (1975 [1948]: 365–97).

<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that the *Philosophy of Right* does not have any critical potential, but it does mean that its critical potential is thin and limited. Recently, Honneth (2010, 2014) and Neuhauser (2000), to name two important contemporary scholars, have used the *Philosophy of Right* to criticize our current predicament. The merits of their work notwithstanding, I believe their approach suffers from the same shortcomings as Hegel's own work. Namely, their work, firstly, remains insufficiently attentive to the actual encroachment of the economic sphere upon all areas of social life in capitalism, and secondly, conceives of the economic sphere not in terms of opposition, but explicitly as a sphere of mutual recognition. Thus their approach ultimately remains affirmative towards the bourgeois-capitalist social order, as does Hegel's own, although they criticize the (supposedly inessential) excesses of economic deregulation. Also, it is worth mentioning that Ruda (2011) has attempted to develop a radical critical theory of society in capitalism on the basis of the *Philosophy of Right*. His attempt is both important and interesting, but is achieved only by doing a great deal of interpretive violence to the text, or so I believe.

Hegel's critical theory of capitalism is to be found in his *Science of Logic*. As I hope to demonstrate, the logic<sup>6</sup> has a great critical potential that far transcends Hegel's own official appraisal of the modern social order, and this potential has as yet not been fully explored, let alone exploited. According to Negri, "Spinoza's true politics is his metaphysics."<sup>7</sup> In an analogous way, my aim is to show that Hegel's true politics resides in his metaphysics.

In undertaking a project of developing a critical theory of society on the basis of the logic, I deliberately depart from the general trend of scholarship on Hegel's social and political philosophy, especially the Anglophone scholarship. Perhaps under the influence of Rawls, who thought questions of metaphysics wholly irrelevant to questions of politics, the recent scholarship on Hegel has tried to disentangle Hegel's social and political philosophy from its support in the logic. Some prominent examples will suffice: Honneth, who bases his "normative reconstruction" of Hegel's social thought on the *Philosophy of Right*, explicitly states that in "our post-metaphysical standards of rationality" appealing to the logic in the context of practical philosophy is not allowed. Honneth's reading of Hegel, as he himself remarks, "does not depend on *any* argumentative backing by his logic." Similarly, in the introduction to his now classic book on Hegel's philosophy of right, Wood programmatically announces that "speculative logic is dead; but Hegel's thought is not." And Neuhouser adopts a more modest type of the same approach by intentionally ignoring the logic in discussing Hegel's social theory.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the current academic interpretation of Hegel, there is a long tradition of using the logic for developing critical social theory, a tradition that goes back to Marx. In his youth, Marx offered a devastating critique of the affirmative character of Hegel's philosophy of right, yet he remained fascinated by Hegel's dialectical logic throughout his life. It is worthwhile emphasizing that the view that Marx grappled with Hegel only in his "philosophical" youth, and then abandoned Hegel in his later "scientific" or "economic" phase, is simply mistaken. While working on his economic theory in 1858, Marx wrote to Engels that the logic had greatly helped him to solve a seemingly technical problem in economics:

<sup>6</sup> Throughout the book, the term "logic" refers to Hegel's conception of logic, as expounded mainly in the *Science of Logic*, but also in the *Encyclopedia Logic*.

<sup>7</sup> Negri (1991: 114).

<sup>8</sup> See Honneth (2010: 5 and 48, my emphasis); Wood (1990: 4–8); Neuhouser (2000). Similar approaches are taken by Patten (1999) and Hardimon (1994).



I am, by the way, discovering some nice arguments. e.g. I have completely demolished the theory of profit as hitherto propounded. What was of great use to me as regards method of treatment was Hegel's *Logic* at which I had taken another look by mere accident . . . If ever the time comes when such work is again possible, I should very much like to write 2 or 3 sheets making accessible to the common reader the *rational* aspect of the method which Hegel not only discovered but also mystified. (MEW 29: 260, MECW 40: 249)<sup>9</sup>

The attention to Hegel's logic continued in the Marxian tradition. In 1878, Engels published *Anti-Dühring*, which was greatly influenced by the logic. (However, since Engels's aim was to popularize the dialectical logic, he unfortunately oversimplified Hegel, an oversimplification that proved later to be more harmful than helpful to the reception of Hegel.) Similarly, it was arguably Hegel's logic that helped Lukács to develop his revolutionary theory in *History and Class Consciousness*. The logic, although with a different interpretation, remained pivotal to Lukács's later project of developing his elaborate account in *Ontology of Social Being*. Finally, in the case of Adorno, multiple courses of lectures on sociology and sociological philosophy as well as the *Negative Dialectics* clearly demonstrate the centrality of engagement with Hegel's logic to his critical theory of society in capitalism.

The Hegelian-Marxian tradition thus made ample use of the logic to explain society and politics in capitalism. But what is Hegel's own understanding of the relation between the logic and society? There are two relatively distinct questions in this regard. First, does Hegel rely on the logic in his own social and political philosophy in the *Philosophy of Right*? In fact, despite the current scholarship that tends to refute or ignore the logical foundations of Hegel's social theory,<sup>10</sup> there is textually no doubt that Hegel himself regards his social and political philosophy as presupposing the logic. Not only in the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right* does he explicitly state that the philosophical foundation of the book must be found in the logic (PR §2, §6, §31), but at crucial stages of the book he also makes his argument mainly by appealing to the logic (PR §141, §272, §280).<sup>11</sup> In the present book, I will not explore how the logic is used in

<sup>9</sup> Also, in the 1873 postface to *Capital*, while referring to Hegel's dialectical logic and despite the fact that Hegel was not fashionable at the time, Marx does not hesitate to "openly avow [him]self as the pupil of that mighty thinker [i.e., Hegel]" (MEW 23: 27, C I: 103).

<sup>10</sup> There have, however, been a few recent attempts to revive the interpretation of the *Philosophy of Right* on the basis of the logic. See especially Goodfield (2014).

<sup>11</sup> The issues for which Hegel directly appeals to the logic in his social and political theory include, among others, the transition from morality to the ethical life (§141), the critique of the liberal

the *Philosophy of Right*. My aim is rather to use the logic to develop a critical social theory on the basis of the logic, and this brings us to our second question: namely, is the logic itself affected by social relations in bourgeois-capitalist social relations, or is the logic a purely metaphysical theory that is not sensitive to historical experience?

Hegel seems to be equivocal regarding the question of the historicity of the logic. It is true that in the 1812 Introduction he avers that the content of the logic is “the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence, before the creation of nature and a finite mind” (WL I: 44, SL 50). Yet he simultaneously insists that “the system of the logic is the realm of shadows” [das Reich der Schatten] (WL I: 55, SL 58), clearly implying that the logical categories are not self-standing, but shadow, or track, the empirical world – and the empirical world for Hegel is developed in history. He makes the same point, more strongly, in the 1831 preface to the second edition by describing the project of the logic in terms of the “reconstruction” [Rekonstruktion] of the empirical, historical experience in the realm of pure thought (WL I: 30, SL 39).<sup>12</sup> And finally it is not in vain that Hegel compares the logic to the grammar of a language. The grammar, of course, cannot exist independently of the language whose grammar it is, and yet it is possible to extract the rules of grammar, and articulate them in an abstract and general manner. It is worth mentioning how Hegel compares a beginner in learning a language with a competent speaker:

He who begins the study of grammar finds in its forms and laws dry abstractions, arbitrary rules, in general an isolated collection of definitions and terms which exhibit only the value and significance of what is implied in their immediate meaning; there is nothing to be known in them other than themselves. On the other hand, he who has mastered a language and at the same time has a comparative knowledge of other languages, he alone can make contact with the spirit and culture of a people through the grammar of its language; the same rules and forms now have a substantial, living value. Through the grammar, he can recognize *the expression of spirit as such, that is, logic* [*Ausdruck des Geistes überhaupt, die Logik*]. (WL I: 53, SL: 57, my emphasis)

conception of the division of powers in the modern state (§272), and the nature of sovereignty in the modern state (§280).

<sup>12</sup> Similarly, in the Introduction to the *Encyclopedia* (1830), Hegel writes that “the process of taking up this [empirical] content, in which thinking sublates its mere givenness and the immediacy that still clings to it, is at the same time a process of thinking developing out of itself.” Thus, in Hegel’s view, philosophy aims at “depiction and replication” [Darstellung und Nachbildung] of what is found in experience in terms of pure thought (EL §12). See also Hartmann (1976: 6) and Pinkard (2002: 250), who take the view that the logic is reconstructive. The opposite, aprioristic, reading of the logic is taken by Hölsle (1998) and Houlgate (2006).

The grammar of a language obviously co-evolves with the language itself. It is not the case that *first*, there is a grammar, which *then* gets embodied in the language. Similarly, the logic does not obtain antecedently to history, but develops as history develops; which is to say that the logic is constituted by historical experience. Interestingly, for Hegel, it is the abstract grammar of the language – rather than its lexicon or semantics – that expresses the inner life of the language. Similarly, my aim is to show that it is the logic, rather than Hegel's political philosophy, that expresses the spirit of capitalism.<sup>13</sup>

Even if the question of the relation of the logic to history cannot be decided on the basis of Hegel's official pronouncement in the *Science of Logic*, a stronger case for the historicity of the logic can be made specifically for the "logic of essence," which is the focus of the present study. As we will see in detail later, the central category of the logic of essence is "actuality." While, in the logic of essence, Hegel conceives of actuality, proper to the subject-matter of the book, in logical terms, in various other places in his corpus he emphasizes its empirical and historical import. In the Introduction to the *Encyclopedia*, for example, he warns that philosophy must be aware that its content is not purely a priori, but is "the basic content that has originally been produced and reproduces itself in the sphere of the living spirit," and he calls this historically produced content "actuality" (EL §6). Actuality is therefore, at the same time, both a logical *and* a historical concept, and thus provides the very basis of the historical ontology that Hegel develops in the logic of essence.<sup>14</sup>

If we take this view of Hegel, namely, that Hegel's logic is the reconstruction of historical actuality in terms of the most general categories of thought, we will have to accept that Marx's view – despite his recurrent rhetoric against Hegel's "idealism" – is in fact very close to Hegel's. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx first criticizes what he takes Hegel's logic to be about – i.e., "thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself" – in order to contrast it with his own view. Rejecting such supposedly Hegelian apriorism, Marx holds that the correct

<sup>13</sup> It is worthwhile to refer one more time to Negri, who asserts that "it is only in the complexity of metaphysics that the modern age can be read" (Negri 1991: xix).

<sup>14</sup> According to Lukács, Hegel's logic is "essentially oriented to the knowledge of society and history." That is to say, the logic is not a historically invariant ontology, but forms a "zeitgemäße Ontologie," i.e., a contemporary ontology (GLW 13: 503, 474). Hegel erred, according to Lukács, when he took as self-subsistent the logical categories that are in fact distilled out of the historical experience of modernity, and then overextended their applicability to the entire realm of being, inclusive of nature and of any society throughout history. This latter point – namely, that Hegel himself intends his logic to be purely a priori – is what I try to question here.

method should aim at “the reproduction of the concrete by way of thought” [Reproduktion des Konkreten im Weg des Denkens] (MEW 42: 35, G 101). Contrary to Marx’s self-understanding, it is not difficult to see how Marx’s “reproduction” and Hegel’s “reconstruction” of the concrete in thought are of the same ilk.

Marx’s point here is a part of his broader “materialist” view, according to which ideas are not simply autonomous, but in some constitutive way depend on the social and historical context in which they arise. Following Marx, Adorno emphasizes that even abstract, metaphysical concepts have an “experiential content” [Erfahrungsgehalt], and thus can properly be understood only through relation to the contexts in which they are nested. Following Adorno – and no matter what we eventually take Hegel’s own view regarding the relation of the logic to history to consist in – my aim in this book is to render the experiential content of the categories of the logic of essence explicit.

## 2 General Aims and Method

The main concept of this book is “power” [Macht]. Hegel is usually considered to be the philosopher of freedom, and not of power. However, upon a close reading of the *Science of Logic*, one realizes that the concept of power plays a pivotal role in the ontology that Hegel develops in the logic of essence.<sup>15</sup> It is true that Hegel does not use the concept of power frequently, yet when he does he uses it decisively. The importance of power for Hegel is especially manifest in his discussion of “substance.” For Hegel, substance is the highest category of the logic of essence and of objective logic. Substance, therefore, is the most determinate ontological category for Hegel, and retrospectively provides the bedrock for all other categories. Importantly, both in the *Science of Logic* and in the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel conceives of substance as “absolute power” [absolute Macht].<sup>16</sup> I read the concept of power backwards in the logic of essence, and show how the development of the categories of essence is best understood in terms of the development of the concept of power.

<sup>15</sup> A brief note about the structure of the *Science of Logic* is necessary. The *Science of Logic* is a two-volume book, consisting of the “objective logic” and the “subjective logic.” The objective logic itself is divided into two parts: the logic of being and the logic of essence. The subjective logic is also called the logic of the Concept. My project is on the logic of essence. For methodological reasons that will become clear later, I entirely ignore the subjective logic (except for a brief discussion in the Conclusion). I will also deal with the logic of being only marginally, namely, insofar as it is necessary for understanding the logic of essence.

<sup>16</sup> See WL II: 220, 224, 246, SL 556, 559, 578, and EL §151, §152.

In focusing on power as an ontological category, I have two distinct, yet closely interrelated aims. Firstly, I will show that Hegel's ontology in the logic of essence is an ontology of power. This means that power is constitutive of the structure of individuals. That is, individuals are what they are only in and through the relation of power that obtains between them. Secondly, I will show that Hegel's ontology of power in the logic of essence specifically captures the structure of social domination in capitalism. To this end, I make substantial use of Marx's mature critique of political economy, and also Adorno's later social theory.

The mode of domination in capitalism has two features that make it distinct from domination in precapitalist social formations. Firstly, while in societies based on slavery or serfdom, there is no claim of equality between masters and slaves or serfs, in capitalism capitalists and workers are equal before the law. Importantly, the structure of domination in capitalism is such that it obtains, not despite equality, but actually on the basis of equality. Secondly, while in slave or feudal societies, the relation of domination was direct and personal – a particular slave or serf was bound to a particular master – in capitalism domination takes on an indirect and impersonal character. A worker is able, or should ideally be able, to change her employer, and yet she continues to be dominated all the same. To use Marx's own phrase, in capitalism individuals are primarily ruled not by persons, but by "abstractions" [Abstraktionen] (MEW 42: 97, G 164).<sup>17</sup>

This book is not a comparative study of Hegel and Marx. Rather, I aim to offer a Marxian interpretation of Hegel's logic *and* a Hegelian interpretation of Marx's critique of political economy. From a scholarly point of view, this approach might strike the reader as confusing, and thus warrants some clarification. The main focus of the book is and remains Hegel's logic. Although a significant portion of the book is on Marx and on Adorno, this does not mean that I am trying to *force* a Marxian interpretation on Hegel. Rather, my methodological principle is to analyze Hegel's text closely, and to make explicit *only* what is already implicit in the text. I concede that adhering to the text may occasionally give the book a dry character, but this strategy pays off. It becomes clear how a close and

<sup>17</sup> In this book, I use the terms "power" and "domination" interchangeably. This is not to say that all forms of power are dominating – there are indeed legitimate forms of power that are not dominating. But it is to say that, insofar as the logic of essence and the structure of capitalism are concerned, power is dominating. Hegel discusses the legitimate form of power, what he calls "the free power," in the logic of the Concept, but fleshing that out requires another book.

meticulous reading of Hegel's logic can bring in new insights about the nature of capitalism, in a way that a merely cursory reading of the logic cannot.

And yet, although I mainly focus on Hegel, this does not mean that I use Marx and Adorno as mere ancillaries to Hegel. Even judged by the standards of Hegel's writing in general, the *Science of Logic* is quite an impenetrable and hermetic text. One can easily get trapped in the language of Hegel, and reproduce a similarly impenetrable and hermetic commentary on Hegel on another level. Adopting a specifically Marxian perspective allows me to unravel Hegel's complex text in a way that a close study of Hegel's logic alone just cannot do. Thus, Marx's work is indispensable in this book, as it frames my entire interpretation of Hegel. Finally, I admit that there is a real tension between the two methodological principles – the two principles being reading Hegel on his own terms, and reading Hegel in light of Marx – but I believe the tension, rather than being constraining, is indeed productive.

### 3 Summary of Chapters

I reconstruct the logic of essence on the basis of three major categories: Schein, which I translate, dependent on context, as “illusion” or “semblance”; “opposition” [Gegensatz]; and “totality” [Totalität]. These three categories cohere with each other, and together constitute a total system of domination, which is, I show, specific to capitalism.

In capitalism, individuals regard themselves as equal to each other. In Chapter 1, I argue that according to Hegel such equality is an illusion that conceals the essential relation of domination between individuals. Such an illusion, however, is not a merely cognitive failure that can be remedied through enlightened reasoning. Rather, the illusion of equality is objective and constitutive of the relations of domination. Analyzing the dialectic of illusion in the logic of essence, I show how equality and domination in capitalism are so interpenetrated that one cannot exist without the other. More specifically, I argue that equality in capitalism functions solely as a moment of the structure of domination, thereby helping domination to perpetuate itself.

In Chapter 2, I analyze the dialectic of “determinations of reflection” in the logic of essence. I show that for Hegel the “identity” of individuals obtains through the relation of “opposition,” and that opposition in its developed form is a relation of domination. The

two claims together establish that for Hegel individuals are constituted in and through the relation of domination that obtains between them. In particular, I argue that for Hegel the relation of opposition is more fundamental than the relation of “diversity,” and that diversity is an objective, necessary illusion that conceals opposition. Turning to Marx, I argue that the relation between capital and labor is necessarily oppositional in character, and that in fact it is a relation of domination. In particular, I argue that the “diversity” of the relation of capital and labor in various economic settings – say in the United States, in China, and in Sweden – is an objective, necessary illusion that masks the essential relation of opposition between them. Finally, in order to further illustrate Hegel’s conception of the fundamentality of opposition, I use MacKinnon’s conception of gender formation. According to MacKinnon, male and female genders are oppositional categories that are solely constructed through the domination of male over female.

The relation of domination between two opposing individuals is not sustainable on its own. It must rather be grounded in a context, in a “totality” that supports such a relation. Given the centrality of the concept of totality in the logic of essence and in capitalism, I devote three chapters to explicating it. I first flesh out Hegel’s conception of totality in the logic of essence (Chapter 3), and then show how Hegel’s conception of totality undergirds Marx’s conception of the totality of capital (Chapter 4). I also discuss how the power of totality over individuals is necessary both in Hegel’s logic and in capitalism (Chapter 5).

Hegel’s ontology in the logic of essence is absolutely relational. That is to say, for Hegel, individuals are not separable from the relations that obtain between them, but are solely derived from those relations. The ontology of absolute relationality commits Hegel to conceiving of the totality of relations as prior to individuals, as that which constitutes individuals. In Chapter 3, I reconstruct parts two and three of the logic of essence in terms of the development of the concept of totality. Hegel ultimately conceives of totality as “substance” which exerts “absolute power” [Macht] over individuals. Individuals have the objective, necessary “illusion” that they have power over each other, yet it is in truth the power of totality that works itself out *through* individuals, causing one to be powerful, and the other to be powerless. Finally, I explain the significance of Hegel’s conception of substance for social ontology. For Hegel, the totality of

society is *sui generis*, and is able to sustain and reproduce itself through individuals. Although individuals are necessary for totality, a particular individual is dispensable and can be replaced with another individual.

The universalization of exchange of commodities in capitalism generates a totality that relates all individuals to one another, and constitutes them in the first place. In Chapter 4, I reconstruct Marx's conception of the totality of capital, and show how capital is *sui generis*, in that it is able to produce the necessary environment for its own development. The *sui generis* character of capital obtains by virtue of capital exerting absolute power over individuals. Individuals, on pain of perishing, have to follow the logic of exchange of commodities. I argue that the absolute power of the totality of capital over individuals is always mediated by the objective "illusion" of the power of individuals over one another. Such absolute power has an impersonal character, since individuals exert power over each other, not *qua* private individuals, but *qua* "personification of economic categories." Moreover, the power of capital over individuals is "nonintentional." Capital is not a free subject that has volition or purpose, I argue, but is an "automatic subject" that blindly follows the laws of maximization of profit, by which it is defined.

Chapter 5 discusses the dialectic of necessity and contingency in Hegel's logic, and explains what it means that the power of totality over individuals is "absolutely necessary." For Hegel, necessity does not exclude contingency, but requires contingency. Hegel's conception of the interrelation of necessity and contingency underpins Marx's analysis of capitalism. Capitalism is essentially a market economy, and the economic laws of capitalism obtain not despite but rather through the irregularities and contingencies inherent to the market. Given the lack of central economic planning, individuals have the illusion of freedom in the market, yet Marx argues that such an illusion only contributes to the "despotism of capital." Finally, I elaborate on the various shapes of freedom in capitalism, and argue that such freedoms are not the freedoms of self-determination but result from contingency and randomness.

Thus, the logic of essence is the logic of the relations of domination constitutive of capitalism. But as noted before, the logic of essence is not the end of the *Science of Logic*. Rather, the logic of essence is superseded by, and replaced with, the logic of the Concept, which is the third and last part of Hegel's logic. In contrast to the logic of essence, the logic of the Concept



is characterized by relations of genuine freedom. Using Marx's critique of Hegel's conception of the state, the Conclusion briefly argues how the supposed transition from the logic of essence to the logic of the Concept cannot possibly transpire within the institutional framework of capitalism.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> In developing a critical social theory on the basis of the logic, I follow Theunissen's suggestion in his groundbreaking work *Sein und Schein: Die kritische Funktion der Hegelschen Logik* (Theunissen 1978), that the logic can be read as an "encrypted social theory." In the Introduction of the book, Theunissen makes two insightful claims that are pivotal to my project, namely, that the logic of being is the logic of the relation of "Gleichgültigkeit" (indifference), and that the logic of essence is the logic of the relation of "Herrschaft" (domination) (25–37). Although Theunissen provides hints towards reading the logic as a social theory, he is not particularly concerned with accomplishing it. I take Theunissen's suggestion in earnest, and by discussing Marx and Adorno, substantiate it in detail. In terms of scope, almost half of Theunissen's book is about the logic of being. Insofar as the logic of essence is concerned, Theunissen focuses on the beginning of the logic of essence, mainly on *Schein*, and to a lesser extent on the determinations of reflection – and there is virtually no discussion of totality. In another short essay, Theunissen (1974) offers some insightful parallels between determinations of reflection and Marx's critique of political economy. Yet, just as in the book, his treatment is very general and remains only programmatic. In terms of content, Theunissen explicitly relies on Christian theology to decipher the logic, and that is not the route that I take. See also Theunissen (1989 [1975]), and a recent critique of it in Yeomans (2015). And finally, in the Conclusion, I criticize Theunissen's one-sided interpretation of the logic of the Concept as the logic of "communicative freedom." Drawing on Theunissen, Fink-Eitel (1978) has also given an account of Hegel's logic of power, but his exposition remains too close to the text and has the character of a mere commentary. Like Theunissen, he does not pursue the social significance of Hegel's conception of power in detail. See also another very brief discussion of power in the logic by yet another student of Theunissen, in Angehrn (1977: 66–70).

## *Illusion or Semblance*

The dialectical method, however, does not permit us simply to proclaim the “falseness” of this consciousness [i.e., ideology] and to persist in an inflexible confrontation of true and false. On the contrary, it requires us to investigate this “false consciousness” concretely as a moment of the historical totality, to which it belongs, and as a layer in the historical process, in which it is effective. (Lukács GLW 2: 222)

Liberal political philosophy, to offer a rough but fair generalization, takes individuals to be free and equal, and then endeavors to construct ideal social and political systems that can accommodate and foster such freedom and equality. In one main branch of liberalism, one of which Rawls is a major representative, no argument is given as to why individuals are to be conceived as equal and free. It is suggested, rather, that we share the basic moral *intuition* that we are equal and free, and that anybody who looks deep into his heart would automatically accept that moral intuition.<sup>1</sup>

From a Hegelian or a Marxian perspective, this way of proceeding, i.e., beginning from the moral intuitions of individuals and constructing a theory that accords to those moral intuitions, is deeply problematic. Intuitions, in the Hegelian or Marxian tradition, are not brute facts. Rather, intuitions are facts that are themselves in need of explanation; and they need to be explained through their status and function in the social context within which they arise. In the case of freedom and equality, Marx emphasizes that the so-called intuitions of equality and freedom emerge with the rise of the capitalist market economy, and thus should be explained by a thorough analysis of the capitalist market economy in its

<sup>1</sup> For a powerful critique of Rawls’s reliance on our basic moral intuitions, see Geuss (2008: 59–101). According to Geuss, intuitions are historically and culturally variable and thus cannot serve as a fixed foundation for political philosophy. Moreover, Geuss especially criticizes the procedure of beginning political philosophy with our intuitions, since this procedure does not take into account that those intuitions might be ideological (Geuss 2008: 90–91).

totality. Indeed, Marx believes that by such holistic analysis, it becomes clear that the moral intuitions of equality and freedom, far from being trustworthy, are indeed ideological. That is to say, in developed capitalist societies, individuals share the intuition that they are equal and free, yet they are in fact unequal and unfree.

From a philological point of view, it is noteworthy that in his mature works – in which Marx undertakes a systematic and detailed analysis of the economic structure of society in capitalism – Marx quite rarely uses the term “ideology”; rather, he uses the term “Schein” to describe the status of freedom and equality in capitalism. “Schein” is a perfect term for Marx’s purpose, since, firstly, it captures the *intuitive* aspect of ideology, namely, as that which appears to us to be immediately the case, and secondly, it captures the *illusory* character of ideology, namely, as that which is false and misleading. For an adequate critique of ideology, Marx cannot simply appeal to some other intuitions that contradict the intuitions on which liberal political philosophy is based. (That is, he cannot make an argument like this: “Look at the status of black people in West Baltimore! How could they possibly be considered as free, and as equal with the CEOs in Wall Street?”) Rather, in order to meet his own standards of scientific and systematic explanation, Marx needs to show (1) why the intuitions of equality and freedom arise in capitalism, (2) why they are illusory, and (3) why, despite their illusory character, such intuitions *persist* in capitalism.

In answering these questions, Marx’s argumentative strategy heavily relies on Hegel’s logic. This might not be immediately evident, since in explicating Schein or semblance as ideology Marx never refers to Hegel.<sup>2</sup> However, given that Marx’s method of critique of political economy in general is deeply influenced by Hegel, it is not surprising to observe a homology between the two on this issue as well. In this chapter, I begin with Adorno’s conception of ideology, which he defines as “socially necessary illusion.” My concern is not to explain Adorno’s conception in all its details, but to indicate its logical underpinnings, which then gives us a framework to approach Hegel and Marx (Section 1.1). Then, I turn to Hegel’s logic in order to discuss what semblance is in the logic of essence

<sup>2</sup> A note about translation is warranted. There is no single English word that can capture the full meaning of “Schein.” As a result, “Schein” has been translated in the literature on Hegel with various terms: semblance, seeming, show, shine, guise, mere appearance, surface appearance, illusion, illusory being, etc. In this book, I will translate “Schein” for the most part either as semblance or as illusion, since these two words capture both the intuitive aspect and the falsity of Schein. I will also, occasionally, use “surface-appearance” when it is appropriate to the context.

(Section 1.2) and to show how the dialectical development of semblance in Hegel expresses the general logic of the critique of ideology (Section 1.3). Finally, I discuss relevant points of Marx's economic theory to show how Hegel's conception of semblance in the logic underpins Marx's theory (Section 1.4). Throughout the chapter, I discuss the logic of ideology by using a paradigmatic example of it, namely, the ideology of equality and freedom in capitalism.

### 1.1 "Socially Necessary Illusion" in Adorno

Marx's conception of ideology radically breaks from the conception of ideology in the enlightenment tradition. According to the enlightened conception of ideology – for which Bacon, Kant, and in the contemporary world Chomsky are among the best representatives – the primary bearer of ideology is an individual subject. An individual may hold an ideological belief because he lacks proper education, and out of ignorance is captivated by prejudices; or he lacks the courage to think on his own and instead prefers to rely on authorities. Thus, in the enlightened tradition, ideology is a kind of *cognitive error* or *cognitive failure* afflicting individuals, and can be remedied through proper education, through willingness to think on one's own, and through enlightened, critical thinking.<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, in the Marxian tradition, the locus of ideology is not individuals, but rather the social relations *between* individuals. In this tradition, not all false ideas, no matter how deeply they are held, would count as ideology. Rather, only those false ideas that are grounded in social relations – and not on any kind of social relations, but only on those social relations that are essential to a given society – would count as ideology. To give an example, some people, out of some specific religious conviction, might believe that the age of the Earth is only a few thousand years. However, this plainly false belief is not, properly speaking, ideology. The belief or lack of belief of those people in the young Earth arguably does not

<sup>3</sup> Bacon and Kant do not use the term "ideology," yet they mean the same thing. In the *New Organon*, Bacon conceives of the locus of ideology as being either in human nature common to all people ("idols of the tribe"), or peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of individuals ("idols of the cave"), or regards ideology as originating from public human communication through careless exchange of words between individuals ("idols of the marketplace"). In all these instances, an individualistic conception of ideology is presupposed. Similarly, in *An Answer to the Question: What Is the Enlightenment?*, Kant ascribes the reason for people's tendency to embrace ideology to their "laziness and cowardice," their "lack of resolution to use understanding without the guidance of another," and to their fixation on "dogmas and formulas" (Kant 1991: 54–55). See Adorno's critique of the enlightened conception of ideology in GS 8: 458–59.

affect the deeper social and political structure of society. By contrast, people's belief that they are equal and free in capitalism is ideology, since such belief is grounded in the social relations that are essential to capitalism; capitalism cannot possibly exist without the belief of people that they are free and equal.

True to the spirit of the Marxian conception of ideology, Adorno defines ideology as "socially necessary illusion" [gesellschaftlich notwendiger Schein] (GS 6: 348).<sup>4</sup> For further clarification, it is helpful to distinguish two aspects of this definition, namely, that ideology is socially necessary, and that ideology is necessary illusion. Ideology is *socially necessary* in the sense that it is embodied in social, political, and legal institutions that are constitutive of society. The belief of people in equality and freedom in capitalism is embodied in the relation of exchange of commodities and in the legal contract that enforces it. Thus, the institution of exchange and the institution of contract have an ideational component, so to speak, and cannot possibly exist without it.<sup>5</sup> The necessity of ideology can be expressed in two logically interdependent aspects: systematic and functional. The necessity of ideology is *systematic*, in the sense that it fundamentally coheres with the essential structure or the totality of society. The belief in equality and freedom in capitalism strongly coheres with the institution of law, with the institution of the market, and with the capitalist political state. The necessity of ideology is *functional*, in the sense that ideology has a proper function within the totality of society, a proper function that contributes to the self-maintenance and self-reproduction of society.

In contrast to mere cognitive failures – mere cognitive failures that we can designate, for the sake of clarity, as "errors" – ideology in the Marxian conception is a *necessary illusion*. That is to say, ideology cannot be wiped out through education, through enlightened reasoning, or through some voluntary resolution to think critically. I may have read all three volumes of

<sup>4</sup> My discussion of ideology in Adorno is indebted to Jaeggi (2009). For other helpful discussions of ideology in the tradition of Critical Theory in general, see Geuss (1981: 4–44) and Schnädelbach (1969). Also, in this tradition, Finlayson (2016: 15–24) offers a refreshing account of ideology from a feminist perspective.

<sup>5</sup> The radical change in the conception of ideology in Marx accords with the radical change that Hegel initiates in the conception of the idea, which Marx subsequently assimilates. Very briefly, this change can be expressed in two points. Firstly, whereas in the enlightenment tradition ideas are generally conceived to be *representational* of reality, for Hegel ideas are *constitutive* of reality. Secondly, whereas in the enlightenment tradition, ideas are primarily conceived to be theoretical, for Hegel ideas are "*actual*" [*wirklich*], that is to say, they are active and "effective" [*wirkend*] in reality; see Jaeggi (2009: 275).

Marx's *Capital*, and may have completely understood why equality and freedom in capitalism are ideology; yet I cannot help acting upon those very ideas: whenever I engage in an economic transaction – and that includes not only buying consumer goods, but also selling my labor-power on a daily basis – no matter what I think, *practically* I act on the basis of the ideas of equality and freedom; which is to say, I am not at any rate in a position to undo my illusions. Thus, in contrast to the enlightened tradition, which focuses on education, for Marx the only way that the ideological illusions can be removed is through a collective emancipatory praxis, a collective emancipatory praxis aiming at changing the very social relations in which those illusions are institutionalized.

The distinction between error and illusion is helpful in grasping the truth-content of ideology. While error is plainly false – the belief in the young Earth is plainly false – ideology is a kind of falsity that contains a moment of truth. Adorno insists that ideology is “the interfolding [Verschränkung] of truth and untruth, which is distinct from complete truth as well as from mere lie” (GS 8: 465). That ideology is the “interfolding” of truth and falsity needs explanation. The word “interfolding” might suggest that the interfolded can be unfolded from each other – like my arms that I can fold together and then unfold. However, for Adorno, the truth and falsity of ideology are so interpenetrated that it is impossible to have one without the other. Thus, we can say that, for Adorno, ideology is *not* like a piece of false data in an otherwise true newspaper report, a piece of false data that can be omitted without changing the report in its entirety.

That in ideology truth and falsity interpenetrate implies that ideology for Adorno is in a sense contradictory. The contradiction inherent in ideology, however, is not a contradiction of traditional logic. (By “contradiction of traditional logic” I mean something of the following sort: “The board is white, and the board is not white, at the same time and in the same respect.”) Rather, the contradiction of ideology is dialectical and results from the coherence of two constitutive moments of ideology that at the same time exclude each other, namely, the moment of truth and the moment of falsity.<sup>6</sup> Adorno does not elaborate on how exactly the

<sup>6</sup> Whether or not the dialectical contradiction refutes the law of noncontradiction is a bone of contention in the current scholarship on Hegel. In the case of Hegel, while Brandom believes that Hegel “far from rejecting the law of non-contradiction . . . radicalizes it, and places it at the very center of his thought” (Brandom 2002: 179), according to Priest (2002), Hegel rejects the law of non-contradiction. I don’t enter into this debate here, as it would take us too far from our project of exhibiting the social dimensions of Hegel’s logic. Bordinon (2012) offers a helpful evaluation of the debate. Also, see my discussion of the structure of dialectical contradiction in Marx (Abazari 2019).

dialectical contradiction of ideology must be conceived, and I substantiate Adorno's insight with a detailed analysis of Hegel's logic and Marx's economic theory in the rest of the chapter. Here some preliminary remarks must suffice.

Capitalist society appears to individuals as a system of equality and freedom, and in a certain sense this is indeed true. If individuals were not equal and free, they could not engage in market transactions. And yet, in capitalism the equality and freedom that obtains in the market is only a surface-appearance *of* a deeper essence, a deeper essence that is defined in terms of inequality and domination. Thus construed, the ideology of equality and freedom is both true and false. Ideology is true insofar as it is conceived as a surface-appearance that exists on its own. And it is false insofar as it is conceived as a surface-appearance *of* an essence, as a semblance *of* an essence that conceals the essence.

Alternatively, we may express the same point in the following way. The institution of the market, which operates on the basis of equality and freedom, is not all that there is to capitalism. Rather, the market functions as a *moment* of the totality of capital, as a moment that systematically and functionally coheres with the totality of capital. The ideology of equality and freedom thus is true insofar as the market is conceived in isolation from the totality of capital. However, the ideology of equality and freedom becomes false insofar as it is conceived as a moment *of* capital, as a moment that does not exist on its own, or for its own sake, but as a moment that both coheres with the totality of capital and contributes to its self-maintenance.

Adorno additionally expresses the contradiction of ideology in evaluative language. The values of equality and freedom are "in themselves" [an sich] good and desirable, Adorno asserts, but such values within capitalism become bad and oppressive, insofar as they solely function as a moment of the totality of capital (GS 8: 473). That is to say, equality and freedom are good insofar as they are conceived as *self-standing values*, but they become bad as soon as they are conceived as *values in their actualization* in capitalism, since capital only uses those values to systematically undermine them.

Adorno considers ideological thinking – i.e., the kind of thinking that does not recognize ideology as ideology – to be "reified." According to Adorno, the hallmark of reified consciousness is "forgetfulness." The reified consciousness *forgets* that the intuitions are not self-standing, and that they are the effect of essence. The reified consciousness "fetishizes" intuitions, and *forgets* the whole of which the intuitions are but a moment

(NS-V 6: 226).<sup>7</sup> As reified consciousness is marked by forgetfulness, the critique of reified consciousness (or the critique of ideology) consists exactly in the act of “remembering” [Erinnerung], the act of remembering that shows the systematic interconnection of ideology with the totality of essence. Thus, a successful critique of ideology does not simply point out some inconsistencies, or absurdities, or insufficiencies in ideology, but requires a thorough analysis of the totality, of which ideology is a moment. The critique of ideology is thus not a moralistic critique; it is rather – to use a term from Bhaskar (1998) – an “explanatory critique,” a critique that functions by means of the explanation of the systematic interconnection of ideology with totality.

## 1.2 Semblance in the Logic

Having discussed the conception of ideology as Schein in Adorno, let us turn to Hegel’s logic and focus on Hegel’s conception of Schein. From the architectonic point of view, Hegel begins the logic of essence with Schein, i.e., illusion or semblance, which is meant to capture how being is sublated, or integrated, within the structure of essence. Our first step is thus to become familiar with the logic of being and the logic of essence in general.

In the logic of being, Hegel conceives of the relation between individuals in terms of the relation of *Gleichgültigkeit*. For Hegel, the relation of *Gleichgültigkeit* has two aspects: (1) Two individuals that are in a relation of *Gleichgültigkeit* are “indifferent” toward one another, and toward the relation between them. This implies that the relation is not constitutive of individuals, and remains *external* to them. That is, individuals in the logic of being are “self-subsistent” and exist independently from the relation between them. (2) Two individuals in this relation have a symmetrical relation with each other; the one defines the other to the same extent that the other defines the one. In this sense, the relation of *Gleichgültigkeit* is the relation of “equality,” since the relation is *equally valid* [*gleich gelten*] for both of them. The two aspects of the relation of *Gleichgültigkeit* for Hegel are interrelated. When individuals are *equal* with each other, there remains an *indifferent* core to them that is not determinable through the relation between them. Similarly, the *equality* of individuals obtains by virtue of their *indifference* to each other.<sup>8</sup> In the logic of being, individuals

<sup>7</sup> See Honneth (2008), who also discusses – albeit in a different context – the relation of “reification” to “forgetfulness” with reference to Adorno.

<sup>8</sup> In this book, for the sake of brevity, I translate “*Gleichgültigkeit*” as equality, by which I always mean a kind of equality that obtains through indifference.



remain unanalyzable “atoms” that cannot become fully determinate. They are simply given, or in Hegel's language, immediate. The logic of being terminates with the category of “absolute indifference” that expresses the unsurpassable conceptual block that is attained within the framework of being. Hegel's exposition of the logic of being therefore is intended to *criticize* it.

The failure of the logic of being to be adequately determinate demonstrates that being is not sustainable by itself; rather it has to be situated within a more determinate category, namely essence, which gives determination to it. Importantly, essence is not simply another category of the same nature as the categories of being that would emerge in the further development of being, but is fundamentally of a “different nature” (WL II: 15, SL 390). This radically different nature can be articulated in the following two ways: (1) The ontology that Hegel develops in the logic of essence is *absolutely* relational. That is, in the logic of essence the categories are defined *solely* through their relation to each other. And whereas in the logic of being, individuals remain independent from the relations that obtain among them, in the logic of essence, individuals are constituted by these relations. (2) The ontology developed in the logic of essence is the ontology of *domination* [Herrschaft]. In contrast to the relation of equality obtained in the logic of being, in the logic of essence the categories are in an *asymmetrical* relation with each other. This relation of domination, however, is of a special type. It is not direct or immediate; rather it obtains through incorporating a moment of the relation of equality. In other words, the relation of domination in essence obtains not *despite* equality, but *through* equality.

It is helpful to illustrate the above points through examples: (1) The paradigmatic example of the relation of equality in the logic of being is the relation between “something” [Etwas] and “an other” [ein Anderes], between, say, a table and a chair. The two define each other equally. Hegel writes, “if of two things we call one A, and the other B, then in the first instance B is determined as the Other. But A is *just as much* the Other of B. Both are, *in the same way*, Others” (WL I: 125, SL: 117, my emphases). Moreover, although there is a relation between something and other, nonetheless each exists independently from the relation. (Table and chair have a certain spatial or functional relation with each other, yet each exists independently of the other.) (2) A paradigmatic example of the logic of essence is the relation of “substance” and “accidents.” They are, according to Hegel, solely defined through each other. Substance is always substance *of* accidents, and accidents are always accidents *of* substance.

There is an *asymmetrical* relation of domination between the two, since it is *ultimately* substance that gives determination to accidents. However, the relation of domination contains a moment of equality, since inasmuch as accidents are dependent upon substance, for Hegel, substance is dependent upon accidents. The first instance of the relation of domination in the logic of essence is the one obtaining between essence and semblance or illusion. I will discuss this in detail later in the chapter.

The commonsense ontology that forms our intuitive awareness of the social world accords with the logic of being. That is to say, in our everyday life we conceive of the relation between individuals in terms of the relation of *Gleichgültigkeit*. Recall that *Gleichgültigkeit* has the two meanings of indifference and equality. Intuitively, we see an individual – to use a term from Sandel – as an “unencumbered self” (Sandel 1984), as a self that is separable from the social relations in which she stands. The individual, so it seems to us, has an inner citadel, which is ultimately unaffected by, and therefore is *indifferent* towards the surrounding social relations. All individuals share such an inner citadel, and thus, to that extent, all individuals are *equal* with each other. There is no relation of power between individuals, or if there is, it remains external to what makes the individual what she is. Indeed, such equality between individuals obtains through the indifference of individuals to one another. And such indifference grants individuals freedom: it seems to us that individuals are free to choose, as if from afar, what kind of social role they want to take on. Finally, in our intuitive awareness, we regard individuals as totally distinct from each other, and we distinguish individuals in terms of the qualities and quantities that they bear.<sup>9</sup> We tend to characterize a human being X as distinct from others, by, say, their age, nationality, income, level of education, etc.

However, such a conception of individuals – as equal, as free, and as distinct bearers of qualities and quantities – is not true. Rather, Hegel asserts, “the *truth* of being is *essence*” [Die *Wahrheit* des *Seins* ist das *Wesen*], and, then, continues:

Being is the immediate. Since knowing has for its goal knowledge of the true, knowledge of what being is *in and for itself*, it does not stop at the immediate and its determinations, but penetrates it on the supposition that at the back of this being there is something else, something other than being

<sup>9</sup> Quantity and quality belong to the categories of the logic of being. Hegel writes, “ordinary consciousness takes things up as simply being [seiende] and regards them in terms of quality, quantity, and measure” (EL §111Z).

itself, that this background constitutes the truth of being. (WL II: 13, SL 390)

The logic of essence provides the essential categories to understand the invisible background of the visible individuals, the invisible background that is the “truth” of the visible individuals. Now, what *seems* to be a particular human being with particular qualities and quantities turns out *actually* not to be self-subsistent, but rather a result of certain relations, causes, grounds, conditions, forces, etc. that constitute it. It turns out the individuals do not have any core, untouched by mediations, but they are thoroughly – absolutely – mediated. Thus, Hegel insists that, from the standpoint of essence, “*being is illusion*” [*Das Sein ist das Schein*] (WL II: 19, SL 395, original emphasis).

Similarly, the way that capitalism *seems* to individuals is formed through the logic of being. Capitalism is necessarily a market economy. Individuals in market transactions are *equal* before the law and exchange commodities of *equal* value. Marx writes,

since they only exist for one another in exchange as equally worthy persons [als Gleichgeltende], as possessors of equivalent things, who thereby prove their equivalence, they are as equals at the same time also indifferent to one another [sind sie als Gleichgeltende zugleich Gleichgültige gegeneinander]. Whatever other individual distinction there may be does not concern them; they are indifferent [gleichgültig] to all their other individual peculiarities. (MEW 42: 167–68, G: 242)

In market transactions, that is, individuals are self-subsistent atoms that remain external to the relation that makes them equal. Moreover, in market transactions individuals are free. The one does not appropriate the other's property by force or through violence, but by treating him as the owner of property who can dispose of it by his own free will. This is, however, only the way that capitalism seems to individuals, and that seeming is indeed an illusion. The freedom and equality obtained in exchange “appears as the surface process, beneath which, however, in the depths, entirely different processes go on, in which this seeming [scheinbar] equality and freedom disappear” (MEW 42: 173, G 247). The truth is (1) that in capitalism individuals are inseparable from social relations, and thereby thoroughly determined by them, and (2) that these social relations are relations of domination and inequality.

Recall that for Adorno ideology is false, but it is a falsity that is necessary and objective. To the extent that ideology is necessary and objective, ideology participates in truth. Thus, for Adorno, ideology is true and

false at the same time. Exactly the same structure holds in Hegel's conception of illusion or semblance. Semblance, for Hegel, is true insofar as it captures our intuitive awareness correctly, that is to say, insofar as it captures the surface-appearance correctly. Yet, semblance is ultimately false, since semblance is not self-standing, but is always semblance *of* essence – semblance is only a moment of essence, and not the essence itself. The fact that individuals are distinct from each other, that individuals are bearers of certain qualities and quantities, is true. Yet, the same true fact becomes false when it is conceived in relation to the essence that grounds that fact. In truth, individuals and the qualities and quantities they bear are the mere effect of the invisible deeper network of relationality of essence that constitutes them as individuals in the first place.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the simultaneous truth and falsity of being in essence implies that for Hegel, being in essence is not simply discarded; being is rather preserved within essence – and it is preserved as a necessary moment of essence. The necessity of incorporation of being in essence accords with the general feature of Hegel's dialectic, which he elsewhere expresses in the following way:

The *true* system cannot have the relation to the false [das Falsche] of being merely opposed to it [i.e., the false]; since, if this were so, the [true] system, as this opposite, would itself be one-sided. On the contrary, the *true* system as the higher must contain the subordinate [false] system within itself. (WL II: 250, SL 580)

To conclude this section, I would like to clarify an important distinction that Hegel makes in the logic of essence between semblance [Schein] and appearance [Erscheinung]. The distinction, of course, is not merely verbal,

<sup>10</sup> The point that semblance for Hegel is both true and false makes my interpretation of semblance different from Theunissen's (1978). Theunissen distinguishes two *distinct* senses of "untruth" in Hegel: (1) one-sidedness or undevelopedness, and (2) semblance (70–91). According to Theunissen, in the first sense, untruth is opposed to Hegel's dictum "the true is the whole." In the second sense, untruth is opposed to "true actuality," to Hegel's "what in truth is" [was in Wahrheit ist] (71). For Theunissen, untruth in the first sense is "the not-yet-developed," but in the second sense, it is "the thoroughly empty." From these definitions, Theunissen concludes that whereas the untruth qua not-yet-developed remains a part of truth, the untruth qua semblance does *not* participate in truth *at all* (72). The untruth of semblance, he emphasizes, is "complete" and "total" (72–73). I find Theunissen's distinction quite confusing – and simply wrong. It is quite un-Hegelian to think that there can be a kind of semblance that does not participate in truth at all. The central operator of sublation in Hegel's logic is exactly meant to show that the earlier categories don't simply get cancelled out, but are to some extent preserved in the higher categories. This means, contrary to Theunissen, that semblance is not "total untruth," but always a partial untruth. Theunissen seems to be aware of the unclear distinction that he makes, and later conceded that Hegel actually "blends" the two senses of untruth that Theunissen distinguishes (89). See also Yeomans (2012: 47), who criticizes Theunissen on the same point. For a general critical discussion of Theunissen's conception of untruth, see Fulda, Horstmann, and Theunissen (1980: 15ff).

and it is sometimes difficult to cling to a fixed terminology to refer to these concepts. Both semblance and appearance denote the realm of positivity of essence, i.e., the way that essence outwardly exists. For Hegel, appearance is a richer and more determinate category than semblance. In fact, while he begins the logic of essence with semblance, he discusses appearance much later and only after the category of "ground." Semblance is the remaining of being in essence. It is a kind of immediacy that is not yet fully taken up by the mediating activity of essence. By contrast, appearance is a kind of immediacy that is *derived* from essence. In Hegel's words, appearance is "the essentiality that has *advanced to* immediacy" [die zur Unmittelbarkeit *fortgegangene* Wesenheit]; it is "a being that has come forth *from* negativity and inwardness" [ein Herausgegangesen *aus* der Negativität und Innerlichkeit] of essence (my emphases) (WL II: 124, SL 479). That is to say, appearance is a kind of existence, which is fully mediated by, or generated through, the relationality of essence (EL §131Z). As we will see in Chapter 3, appearance is a *totality*, which shows the *totality* of essence. But semblance shows only *some* aspects of essence, it shows only those aspects infected by the immediacy of being. Whereas appearance adequately expresses essence, semblance qua surface-appearance is a partial expression of essence. Thus, for Hegel, it is semblance, rather than appearance, that signifies ideology. Because of its constitutive partiality and incompleteness, there is both truth and falsity in semblance. Semblance shows something of essence, but at the very same time disguises essence. Hegel thus occasionally refers to semblance as a "mere appearance" [nur Erscheinung], as a kind of appearance that is "essenceless" [wesenlos] (WL II: 148, SL 499). By designating semblance as "essenceless," Hegel means that semblance is a kind of appearance that conveys that it is independent of essence, although in truth it is thoroughly dependent on essence. In contrast to semblance, there is no falsity (in the relevant sense discussed here) in appearance qua Erscheinung; appearance manifests essence in the way that it actually is, in its full totality. Freedom and equality, as *false* and *partial* expressions of essence, are to be conceived as semblance that hides the essence of capitalism. But the tendency towards the lengthening of the working day, the incessant technological changes, the progressive mechanization of the labor process, the mass unemployment, the destruction of nature, etc., are directly derived from the essence of capitalism, and thus belong to its appearance.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Marx's usage of the terms "Schein" and "Erscheinung" is not consistent, nor is Hegel's own usage of the terms in his Realphilosophie. Generally speaking, however, they use the terms in the sense discussed above.

### 1.3 The Dialectic of Semblance

We learned that a critique of ideology, according to Marx and Adorno, is not merely to pass judgment that ideology is false. Rather, a successful critique of ideology demands that we show the systematic and functional connection of ideology to the totality of social relations. In this section, I discuss the dialectical development of the category of semblance in the logic of essence, through which Hegel shows how semblance must be conceived in relation to the totality of essence. It will become clear how the dialectic of semblance in Hegel's logic in fact captures the general logic of the critique of ideology.

The dialectical development of semblance occurs through three successive stages: in the first stage, which Hegel grasps through the categories of "the Essential and the Unessential" [das Wesentliche und das Unwesentliche], Hegel shows that semblance is not separable from essence. In the second stage, Hegel shows how semblance is "posited" by the totality of essence; and finally, in the third stage, "reflection" [die Reflexion], Hegel shows how semblance is "posited" by essence as essence's own "presupposition." Through the first two stages Hegel shows how semblance has a systematic connection with essence. Through the third, Hegel shows how semblance has a functional connection with essence, namely, how essence requires semblance in order to reproduce itself.

#### 1.3.1 *Semblance Is Not Separable from Essence*

The first and most intuitive way of thinking about essence and semblance is to think of essence as something hidden, which, so to speak, lies *underneath* semblance. This is a kind of conception of essence that accords with ordinary consciousness, whose mode of thinking is pictorial. The structure of reality, according to this conception, is bilayered. The surface layer, what *seems* to us, is those qualities or determinations that are in truth not constitutive of reality – they are the Unessential. The deeper layer or the core is those invisible qualities and determinations that make reality what it is; they are the Essential.<sup>12</sup> According to this conception, the semblance (the Unessential) is a false appearance that is *separate* from the true essence (the Essential) of reality.<sup>13</sup> In this way, according to Hegel,

<sup>12</sup> I capitalize the terms the Essential and the Unessential whenever I specifically refer to these categories that Hegel discusses in the beginning of the dialectic of semblance in the first stage.

<sup>13</sup> This conception of essence and semblance repeatedly appears in different guises in the history of philosophy. For Plato, the illusory, sensible world (in the standard reading) is detachable from the

Essence itself is an *existent* [*seiendes*] immediate essence, and being is only a negative *in relation* to essence; [essence is] not in and for itself; therefore, essence is a *determinate* negation. In this way, being and essence relate to each other again as *others*; *for each has a being, an immediacy*, and these are indifferent to each other, and with respect to this being, being and essence are equal in value. (WL II: 18, SL 394)

Conceptualizing the relation of essence and semblance in terms of the Essential and the Unessential is a “relapse” into the logic of being. Like something and other in the logic of being, here essence and semblance cannot define each other through the relation between them, and thus remain equal and indifferent to each other. Moreover – and this is another point – if we want to distinguish the Essential from the Unessential of reality, according to Hegel, we end up with an indeterminate situation, since we cannot know what precisely the Essential is. The decision as to what to conceive as the Essential does not originate from objective reality itself. It rather turns upon our merely subjective attitude, such that “the same content can sometimes be regarded as the Essential and sometimes as the Unessential” (WL II: 19, SL 395).

The indeterminacy of the relation of the Essential to the Unessential shows that it is wrong to conceive semblance as separable from essence. It shows, in a negative way, that they thoroughly interpenetrate. This means that although we can use the pictorial metaphors of core/surface, center/periphery, inner/outer, background/foreground to describe the relation of essence and semblance in natural language – as both Hegel and Marx frequently do – we should be aware that the metaphor is misleading and distorts the conceptual truth of the total imbrication of the two.<sup>14</sup> Thus, when Rosa Luxemburg in her pamphlet on the Russian Revolution writes that “we have always revealed the hard kernel of social inequality and lack of freedom hidden under the sweet shell of formal equality and freedom” (Luxemburg 2012: 220), we should not take her claim literally – as if she meant that the “sweet shell” of ideology or semblance can be removed from the “hard kernel” of essence of capitalism through some enlightened reasoning. Rather, we should read her in the same way that Adorno conceives of ideology when he writes that “ideology does not overlie the social being like a detachable layer, but is inherent in it” (GS 6: 348). In fully developed capitalism, equality and domination are indissolubly

true realm of ideas. For Locke, the “real essence” is the “real internal” upon which “discoverable qualities” of objects are anchored (Locke 1975: Book 3, Chapter 3, §15).

<sup>14</sup> “To imagine show [Schein] as a veil thinly hiding a bright light involves precisely the wrong metaphor. The moment of being in which essence shows is within essence” (Mure 1950: 93).

bound such that it is not possible to have the one without the other. This means that freedom and equality in developed capitalism only obtain by virtue of domination and inequality, inasmuch as a developed capitalist system of domination can only exist by virtue of providing freedom and equality.

### 1.3.2 *Semblance Is Posited by Essence*

The result of the dialectic of the Essential and the Unessential is to show that it is wrong to understand essence as simply excluding being or semblance. In the second stage, Hegel conceives essence as a *totality* that *contains* – rather than excluding – semblance. Semblance is no longer self-subsistent in juxtaposition to essence, but is conceived solely as semblance *of* essence. Being or semblance “is not free,” Hegel now emphasizes, “but is present *only* as related with its [i.e., essence’s] unity” (WL II: 15, SL 391, my emphasis). That is to say, being or semblance is dominated by essence.

Hegel’s conception of essence as a totality is curious, in that he is equally committed to the two following contradictory claims: (1) the claim that essence is a totality that does not allow any otherness of being or semblance; (2) the claim that being or semblance retains some sort of otherness to essence. Instead of shying away from this contradiction, Hegel emphatically defines semblance in terms of contradiction:

*Being is semblance.* The being of semblance consists solely in the sublatedness of being, in its nothingness; this nothingness it has in essence and apart from its nothingness, apart from essence, semblance is not. It is the negative posited as the negative.<sup>15</sup> (WL II: 19, SL 395)

For Hegel, being or semblance functions as the other of essence, but this other is not “true”: “here we have no true other” (EL §III Z), he writes. Being or semblance *is*, but not as something that *is*; rather as something that *is not*. Its mode of *existence*, therefore, is that of *nonexistence*. It exists, but not as something *positive*; rather as something *sublated* or *negated* in essence. Hegel calls semblance “the inherently null” [das an sich Nichtige] (WL II: 21, SL 397). The nullity of semblance is not the nullity of complete absence of determination.<sup>16</sup> Rather, it is a nullity that results from the

<sup>15</sup> “*Das Sein ist Schein.* Das Sein des Scheins besteht allein in dem Aufgehobensein des Seins, in seiner Nichtigkeit; diese Nichtigkeit hat es im Wesen, und außer seiner Nichtigkeit, außer dem Wesen ist er nicht. Er ist das Negative gesetzt als Negatives.”

<sup>16</sup> Such a conception of nullity is already discarded in the very first pages of the book in the dialectic of being–nothing–becoming.



inherently unstable character of semblance, from the simultaneity of its being related and not related to essence.

Thus, semblance has a structure of dialectical contradiction in that it consists of two moments that cohere, yet at the same time exclude each other: one, a moment of being that purports to exist independently of essence; two, a moment of being that is fully taken up by essence, and is therefore dependent on it. One should not try to dissolve this contradiction by denying one of the contradictory moments, or by conceiving of the contradictory entity as simply and purely nonexistent, or by trying to transform the contradictory entity into other entities, but should simply “grasp and assert the contradiction” (WL II: 77, SL 441). In his exposition of the concept of contradiction in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel insists,

*Speculative thought* consists only [nur] in holding firm to contradiction and to itself in the contradiction, but not in the sense that, as it happens in ordinary thought, it would let itself be ruled by it and allow it to dissolve its determinations into just other determinations or into nothing.<sup>17</sup> (WL II: 76, SL 440, underline mine)

As the structure of Hegel's contradiction shows, Hegel is emphatically against conceiving of contradiction as a middle term or a mean between two opposing determinations.<sup>18</sup> It is not the case that semblance is partially determined by essence, and partially not determined by essence. Hegel is unequivocal on this point, when he writes that “being *in its totality* has withdrawn into essence” [Das Sein ist *in seiner Totalität* in das Wesen zurückgegangen] (WL II: 21, SL 397, my emphasis). If we conceive being or semblance as determined or dominated by essence *in some respect*, and as free from the determination or domination of essence *in some other respect*, there will be again a “relapse” into the relation of the Essential and the Unessential. Such a relation conceives of essence and

<sup>17</sup> I have used George di Giovanni's translation with slight modification (*The Science of Logic*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 383).

<sup>18</sup> Adorno had an especially keen eye on this point in Hegel's philosophy, a point that he expresses in various contexts. According to Adorno, the conception of mediation that regards it as a “mean” between two extremes belongs to the ancient philosophy, specifically to Aristotle's. This gets articulated notably in Aristotle's ethical theory that regards virtue as a mean (properly understood) between two extremes (e.g., courage being a mean between cowardice and rashness). Logically speaking, mediation in this case is a *separate* thing that occurs in the space *between* the two extremes. According to Adorno, Aristotle did not have a proper conception of “dialectical” mediation, which relates and thereby constitutes the two extremes in their very extremity (NS-V 14: 70ff, especially 75; see also NS-V 2: 264–65). Whether or not Hegel himself would agree with Adorno's reading of Aristotle is not my concern here.

semblance as excluding each other, and cannot thereby be adequately determinate. The moment of existence of semblance and the moment of nonexistence of semblance cohere with each other; they do not get watered down to a partial existence and a partial nonexistence. This logical point is extremely important in understanding the relation of domination and equality in capitalism, and I discuss it later.

Hegel's term for describing the relation of essence to semblance is "positing" [Setzen]. He writes that "semblance is essence's own positing" (WL II: 17, SL 393). That essence posits semblance means that essence generates or produces semblance.<sup>19</sup> Semblance cannot exist untouched by or indifferent to essence, since it is already generated by essence.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the act of positing distinguishes the logic of essence from the logic of being. In the logic of being, neither of the two individuals (something and an other) generates the other. Each can exist independently of the other and there is a relation of equality between them. It is first the act of positing in the logic of essence that establishes the asymmetrical relation of domination, since the posited (semblance) is dependent for its very existence upon the positing (essence). At this stage, the relation of domination seems to be one-way, one in which the dominated (semblance) does not exert any effect on the dominating (essence). However, in the third stage Hegel further develops his conception of domination, in order to show that there is indeed a *reciprocal* relation between the dominating (essence) and the dominated (semblance). I discuss this conception below.

### 1.3.3 *Semblance Is Posited by Essence as Essence's Own Presupposition*

Hegel's conception of essence and its relation to semblance is unique in the history of philosophy. This uniqueness gets articulated with the concept of "reflection." I have explained that the logic of essence is characterized by two themes: (1) the ontology of absolute relationality; (2) the ontology of domination. In reflection, Hegel interweaves these two themes and articulates them in their unity. Hegel's exposition of reflection in the *Science of Logic* is pivotal to his philosophy in general. In this section, I do not aim to

<sup>19</sup> Pinkard even suggests that "Setzen" can be translated into English as "generate" or "produce" (Pinkard 1988: 195). See also Hegel's own definition of "positing" in the *Philosophical Propaedeutic*: "Insofar as the act [of essence] is a difference of essence from itself, through which being or determinacy is *produced* [hervorgebracht], the act is positing" (WW 4: 17, my emphasis).

<sup>20</sup> In Klaus Hartmann's terms, semblance is not a *mere oppositum* to essence, but is "an oppositum that is internal to essence" (Hartmann 1999: 170).

show the systematic significance of reflection. I limit myself to explaining how reflection captures the proper relation of essence and semblance.<sup>21</sup>

"Reflection" is of course a loaded term in the history of philosophy, and even in Hegel's philosophy it has different significance in different periods of his thought. We thus need to be aware of the specific meaning that Hegel gives to it in the logic of essence. We might tend to believe that reflection is the subjective activity of thinking that takes the objective world for granted, and *then* comes onto the scene to reflect on it. However, subjective reflection for Hegel counts only as an insufficient form of reflection, as "external [äußere] reflection." According to Hegel, reducing the concept of reflection in general to external reflection has legitimately put the concept in disrepute, and has made it seem to be the "polar opposite and hereditary foe of the absolute method of philosophizing" (WL II: 31, SL 405). Hegel attempts to save the concept of reflection from this reduction, and programmatically avers "But what is under discussion here [i.e., in Hegel's own logic] is neither reflection at the level of consciousness, nor the more specific reflection of the Understanding . . . but of reflection in general [Reflexion überhaupt]" (WL II: 30, SL 404).<sup>22</sup> The problem with external reflection is that it takes reflection to be within the thinking subject, to be external to the constitution of the object itself. In contrast, for Hegel reflection is *constitutive* of the object; it makes the object what it is. More precisely, reflection is the very basic relation that constitutes essence as essence.

In the logic of being, a relation obtains between self-subsistent *things*, which can exist apart from the relation. In the logic of essence, reflection obtains between essence and semblance, which are constituted by reflection. As essence is defined in terms of the *relation* of domination, and being in terms of the *relation* of equality, reflection therefore is a *relation* obtaining between *relations*; it is thus a second-order relation. Hegel emphasizes that "reflection is the *pure mediation* as such [die *reine Vermittlung überhaupt*]" (WL II: 81, SL 445); namely, a kind of mediation which mediates between two forms of mediation. In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel relates his conception of reflection to light when it hits a mirror.

<sup>21</sup> For helpful discussions of the chapter on reflection, see the classic essay by Henrich (1978), and Houlgate (2011). The chapter on reflection is also productively appropriated to explain the structure of agency in Hegel's practical philosophy (Yeomans 2012: 36–64), to evaluate the metaphysical import of Hegel's logic in general (Moyar 2012), and to discuss the relation of spirit and nature in Hegel (Quante 2002).

<sup>22</sup> For a helpful discussion about the concept of "reflection in general" or simply "reflection" and its difference from subjective reflection, see Jaeschke (1978).

The light ray exists one time as forward-going, and the same light ray exists another time as backward-going (EL §112Z). What this simile shows is the recursivity of reflection. The relation of essence and semblance is always two-way. Essence posits semblance, but through this positing, it constitutes itself as essence. In other words, there is a relation of essence to semblance, which then reflects back from semblance to essence, and makes essence what it is. Hegel uses different expressions to convey the recursivity of the reflection constituting essence: "The return of essence is . . . its self-repulsion from itself." Reflection's "self-repelling is the coming-to-itself." The relation of essence to its other is "bent back" onto itself, and "the reflective movement is to be taken as an *absolute recoil* upon itself" (WL II: 26–27, SL 401–2). As all these expressions indicate, essence for Hegel is not a neo-Platonic pre-mediated One that emanates itself into the seeming world, but rather is nothing but the very relation between essence and semblance which recursively constitutes essence. The reflexive structure of reflection makes essence a *self-grounding* category. Essence relates to semblance, and in so doing it grounds itself as essence.<sup>23</sup>

In the second stage, we learned that Hegel conceives essence to be "positing" semblance. Hegel now shows that such a conception is inadequate, since any act of producing or generating *requires* some materials with which it can produce or generate. In other words, any act of "positing" is at the same time an act of "presupposing." Hegel's conception of essence is peculiar in that he wants to show that essence uses or requires ("presupposes") the very *same* material that it produces ("posits"). That is, what essence posits [Setzen] is the same as that which it has already in-advance-positated [Voraussetzen].

In order to articulate that essence's positing semblance and essence's presupposing of semblance coincide, Hegel introduces three forms of reflection, what he calls (1) the "positing" [setzende], (2) the "external" [äußere], and (3) the "determining" [bestimmende] reflection. It is the third one that adequately expresses reflection, and the first two are one-sided abstractions from it. Hegel's exposition of reflection is particularly cumbersome, but his general point is clear: (1) In "positing" reflection, essence is conceived to be creating semblance; but it is *forgotten* that in such creation essence already requires semblance. Essence is regarded therefore as independent of semblance. Correspondingly, semblance is regarded as a *mere* seeming, a *mere* illusion, that does not have any objective existence.

<sup>23</sup> The structure of essence that I called "self-grounding," Pinkard designates as "self-subsuming" (Pinkard 1988: 58).

(2) In “external” reflection semblance is conceived to be primary. It is *forgotten* that semblance is not self-standing, but is generated by essence. External reflection is the conceptual articulation of ideological “intuitive” thinking that clings to semblance, and ignores or forgets the genesis of semblance. In other words, external reflection, or ideological, intuitive thinking, treats semblance merely as *given*, and not as mediated by essence.

(3) According to Hegel, “the determining reflection is the unity of *positing* and *external* reflection” (WL II: 32, SL 404). The recursive structure of essence obtains in the determining reflection. Essence and semblance are now thoroughly interrelated. Essence produces semblance, but at the same time it is dependent on it, since it is only through relating to semblance that it can constitute itself as essence. We can depict the three forms of reflection with the following schema:

Positing Reflection: (*essence*–*semblance*)

External Reflection: (*essence*–*semblance*)

Determining Reflection: (*essence*–*semblance*) – (*essence*–*semblance*)<sup>24</sup>

The determining reflection adequately formulates the structure of domination in essence. In contrast to positing reflection, the relation of domination of essence over semblance is not one-way or immediate. Domination in the determining reflection rather obtains by virtue of incorporating a moment of external reflection, i.e., a moment of essence equally determined by semblance. In the determining reflection, there is a reciprocity between essence and semblance; but such reciprocity is eventually an illusion – although an objective illusion – since it is *ultimately* essence that determines semblance. In other words, there is a symmetrical mutual determination of essence and semblance, but such symmetry only exists within the framework of the asymmetrical relation of essence and semblance.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> As the *recursive* structure of the determining reflection shows, Hegel is emphatically against understanding the determining reflection as simply a *mean* between two extremes of positing and external reflection. It is not the case that essence *partially* posits semblance (positing reflection), such that semblance *partially* retains an independent status from essence (external reflection). In contrast, the structure of determining reflection shows that the two opposites of essence and semblance do not get reduced to a middle position, but are constitutively related to each other in their very polar opposition.

<sup>25</sup> The language of symmetry/asymmetry is not perfectly apt to essence, and Hegel himself does not use it in the logic of essence. Symmetry and asymmetry might suggest that the entities between which symmetry or asymmetry obtains are self-standing and can exist apart from the said relations. This is of course not what is at stake in the logic of essence. Hegel uses instead the language of “interiorization” [Erinnerung] of semblance by essence. The choice of words notwithstanding, reflection has the structure that I described above.

In conclusion of our discussion of the dialectic of semblance, let us now consider the implications of Hegel's dialectical argument in the second and third stages regarding the structure of the ideology of equality and freedom in capitalism. I would like to emphasize three points. *First*, Hegel's argument shows that the structure of ideology is contradictory. Equality and freedom exist in capitalism, but not as something given that can exist on their own, but as something sublated or negated within the relations of domination of essence. Thus, the following two groups of people, in their very one-sidedness, are wrong: (a) Those libertarians or liberals who think capitalism is primarily a system of equality and freedom, and who thereby deny that equality and freedom are *generated* through the essence of domination. (Their attitude is that of external reflection.) (b) Those Marxists who think there is no freedom or equality in capitalism, and freedom and equality are sham ideas invented by the ruling class in order to keep the workers at bay. (Their attitude is that of positing reflection.) *Second*, it shows that it is wrong to think equality and freedom are partially determined through the essence of domination, and partially escape from the determination of essence, such that there is a moment of freedom and equality for individuals in capitalism that is immune to the relations of domination. Rather, equality and freedom are *completely* taken up by the relations of domination, such that they *solely* function as a moment of the essence of domination. In other words, equality and freedom in capitalism only help the system of domination sustain itself. *Third*, the relation of domination in capitalism is not something *natural* or *given* but obtains through mediation of the relation of equality. More precisely, the essence of domination is nothing other than the relational structure that obtains between domination and equality, and recursively constitutes domination. The essence of domination *requires* ("presupposes") equality for its function, but at the same time domination *produces* ("posits") the required equality. This means that the structure of domination in capitalism is *self-grounding*; it does not need any appeal to any external or given authority, be it nature (as in ancient Greece) or God (as in medieval times) for its ground.

#### 1.4 The Logic of Ideology in Marx

In this section, my aim is to show that Marx's conception of the ideology or semblance of equality and freedom, in terms of its logical structure, has a close affinity to Hegel's account of semblance in the logic. Marx's dialectical thought is totally embedded in his socioeconomic theory.

Thus, in order to understand the logical form of his analysis, we need to discuss his socioeconomic theory, even if briefly. In the following, I begin by explaining Marx's conception of semblance. Then I discuss how Marx's analysis accords with Hegel's dialectic of semblance.

It is not an exaggeration to claim that Marx's economic theory – in its entirety – is based on the ontological distinction between what *seems* to be the case and what is *actually* the case, i.e., between surface-appearance and essence. Marx emphasizes that “all science would be superfluous, if the outward appearance of things and the essence of things immediately coincided” (MEW 23: 825, C III: 956). It is indeed on the basis of the distinction between surface-appearance and essence that Marx distinguishes vulgar political economy from classical political economy. Marx regards the vulgar economists (Bastiat, Say, Senior) as pure ideologues of capitalism. By contrast, while criticizing classical political economists (Petty, Smith, Ricardo), Marx regards them as committed to scientific investigation, and thereby deserving of due attention. According to Marx, “vulgar economics indeed does nothing more than interpret, systematize and turn into apologetics the intuitive awareness [Vorstellungen] of agents trapped within bourgeois relations of production” (MEW 25: 825, C III: 956). For vulgar political economy, the surface-appearance of capitalism – i.e., the way that capitalism immediately appears to individuals and thus forms their beliefs – is all that there is to capitalism. There is no essence to be further investigated. Thus, what remains for vulgar political economy, according to Marx, is only a “pedantic systematization” of the surface-appearance of society into more or less coherent theory (MEW 23: 95, C I: 175). Vulgar political economy effectively counts as pure ideology, since it takes what people believe at face value, and does not further question the validity of those beliefs.

In contrast to the vulgar economy that denies that there is any essence at all, Marx credits classical political economy with a genuine interest in investigation of “the inner framework of bourgeois relations of production.” Thus, to the extent that classical political economy does not confine itself to “the merely apparent [scheinbar] framework” and seeks to penetrate to the “inner framework” of capitalism, it is indeed science (MEW 23: 95, C I: 174). According to Marx, the problem with classical political economy is not that it is not committed to investigating the essence behind the veil of semblance. The problem is rather that – because of the empiricist framework classical political economy deploys – “even its best representatives remained more or less trapped in the world of semblance their own criticism had dissolved” (MEW 25: 838, C III: 969). According to

Marx, had classical political economy been able to abandon its empiricism, it would have been able to recognize that the surface-appearance of capitalism is not only different from the essence of capitalism, but indeed distorts and falsifies that essence – hence Marx’s own usage of the term “semblance” [Schein] to describe the surface-appearance of capitalism.

The finished shape of economic relations [in capitalism], as these are visible on the surface, in their real existence, and therefore also in the intuitive awareness with which the bearers and agents of these relations seek to gain an understanding of them, is very different from the shape of their inner core, which is essential but concealed, and the concept corresponding to it. It is in fact the very reverse [verkehrt] and antithesis [gegensätzlich] of this. (MEW 25: 219, C III: 311)

Note how Marx emphasizes that the surface-appearance in capitalism is not only “very different” from the essence, but is also exactly the “reverse and antithesis” of what is essentially the case.<sup>26</sup> This is pointedly clear in the case of the ideas of equality and freedom. In capitalism, individuals entertain the belief that they are equal and free; yet they are, in fact, unequal and unfree. The false belief of individuals in equality and freedom, however, is not an arbitrary subjective error that does not need to be explained. Rather, the ideology of equality and freedom is objective – it is socially necessary, it “arises from the very relations of production” (MEW 23: 559, C I: 667). The task of the critique of ideology for Marx precisely consists in *explaining* how such belief in equality and freedom, while being false, is nonetheless necessary.

According to Marx, *the* defining feature of capitalism – what distinguishes capitalism from the previous modes of production – is the institution of wage-labor. The relation of wage-labor at the same time is the very source of the semblance of equality and freedom in capitalism.

We understand the decisive importance of the transformation of the value and price of labor-power into the form of wages. All the notions of justice held by both the worker and the capitalist, all the mystifications of the capitalist mode of production, all capitalism’s illusions about freedom, all apologetic tricks of vulgar economics, have as their basis this form of appearance, which makes the actual relation invisible, and indeed presents to the eye the precise opposite of that relation. (MEW 23: 562, C I: 680)

<sup>26</sup> See Rosen (1996: 200ff) for a helpful discussion. Also, note that here Marx does not make a historically invariant claim that in all social formations the surface-appearance is false; he rather makes a historical claim that it is in capitalism that surface-appearance is illusory.



Marx analyzes the relation of wage-labor in two consecutive stages: (1) insofar as it occurs in the realm of the market, or what he calls the sphere of “circulation” of commodities (the transactions made in the market are that aspect of capitalism that is visible to individuals); and (2) insofar as it occurs as a moment of the *totality* of the economy, which includes – in addition to the sphere of circulation – the sphere of “production” of commodities. For Marx, the totality of the economy is “capital” itself, which is a relational structure that is invisible to the individuals, and can be understood only through analysis.

(1) Labor contracts are made in the sphere of circulation or the market. The worker sells the commodity that he possesses, i.e., his “labor-power,”<sup>27</sup> to the capitalist, for which he receives a wage. In capitalism, the worker is free in the sense that he can alienate his labor-power and sell it, in exchange for a wage, to whomever he wants. Moreover, the transaction between the capitalist and the worker exactly follows – as Marx never gets tired of emphasizing – the general law of exchange of *equivalents*. The capitalist pays the *full* value of the labor-power, and this involves *no* cheating.<sup>28</sup> Marx concedes that “the sphere of circulation is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. It is the exclusive realm of freedom, [and] equality” (MEW 23: 189, C I: 280). The freedom and equality obtained through market transactions are real and objective. Yet Marx identifies them – and indeed the whole market – with “pure semblance” [reiner Schein]. The market, he writes, is “the phenomenon of a process taking place behind it” (MEW 42: 180, G: 255). The process taking place behind is the process of production of commodities.

(2) Labor-power is a special commodity. Its use-value, its consumption, is the actual process of labor, which constitutes the sphere of production. In the process of production, the worker through his labor produces more

<sup>27</sup> There is an important distinction in Marx's analysis between “labor-power” [Arbeitskraft] and “labor” [Arbeit]. What the worker sells to the capitalist is his “labor-power,” which is his “capacity to labor” [Arbeitsvermögen], not his actual “labor.” Once the worker has sold his “labor-power,” he sets it into motion in the sphere of production, which results in “labor.” For Marx, labor is not at all a commodity that can be sold or exchanged: “Labor is the substance, and the immanent measure of value, but it has no value itself” (MEW 23: 559, C I: 677). The distinction between labor-power and labor is one of Marx's theoretical innovations, and is meant, as we will see, to show how production of *surplus*-value does not violate the law of exchange of *equivalents*. In other words, it is meant to explain how equality is objective, and at the same time consistently coheres with inequality.

<sup>28</sup> The value of *labor-power* is determined through the value embodied in the products that the worker *consumes* in his life, such as food, clothing, shelter, car, computer, etc. It does not have anything to do with the value that the worker *produces* for the capitalist through his actual *labor*. That happens in the sphere of production.

value than the value that he has been paid for. Marx divides the working day (say, 10 hours) into two parts. The first part, during which a value equal to the value of labor-power (say, 4 hours) is produced, he calls the “necessary labor.” Any work that is done beyond the necessary labor, he calls “surplus labor” (here, 6 hours) (MEW 23: 231, C I: 325). As the production of surplus-value is a necessary feature of capitalism, there *must* always be surplus-labor. Indeed, the sole reason that the capitalist hires the worker is for the latter’s surplus-labor. This means that, seen *from the viewpoint of the totality* of economy, there is no exchange of *equivalents*, and the exchange of equivalents in the sphere of circulation has been only a semblance:

This exchange of equivalents proceeds; it is only the surface layer of a production, which rests on the appropriation of alien labor *without exchange*, but with *the semblance [Schein] of exchange*. This system of exchange rests on *capital* as its basis, and when it is regarded in isolation from capital, as it appears on the surface, as a *self-subsistent* system, then it is a mere *illusion [Schein]*, but a *necessary illusion [ein notwendiger Schein]*. There is no longer any ground for astonishment that the system of exchange values – exchange of equivalents measured through labor – turns into, or rather reveals as its hidden background, the *appropriation of alien labor without exchange*, complete separation of labor and property. (MEW 42: 417, G 509)

The extraction of surplus-labor is not specific to capitalism. In all class societies, a group of people must do more work than what is necessary for their subsistence. What is specific to capitalism, though, is the specific *form* that the extraction of surplus-labor takes. In capitalism, the extraction of surplus-labor has to be always mediated through the semblance of equality obtained in the market. This equality is false, but it is a falsity that is objective.

Now, let us see how Marx’s critique of ideology parallels Hegel’s dialectic of semblance, as we discussed before.

#### *1.4.1 Equality Is Not Separable from Domination*

For Hegel, equality and domination, or the semblance and the essence, are thoroughly interpenetrated, and it is not possible to dissociate the former from the latter. In order to understand the same point in Marx’s analysis of capitalism, let us compare the work of a peasant in feudal Europe liable to compulsory work (*corvée*) with the work of a worker in capitalism (MEW 23: 593, C I: 713). The peasant is obliged to work, say, three days a week for

his lord on the lord's domain. The other three days, he works for himself on his own land. The spheres of equality and domination are sharply distinguished from each other – substantially, temporally, and spatially. In the eye of the peasant, the forced labor for the lord never acquires the character of his own voluntary labor. There is no semblance or illusion of equality involved here. The extraction of surplus-labor is immediate and direct, and the relation of domination is transparent. Now let us look at the worker in capitalism. The worker still works, say, three days a week for himself, i.e., the necessary labor to compensate for the value of his labor-power. The other three days, he works for the capitalist to generate surplus value. But this is not the way the working week *seems* to the worker. The six days of work appear to him as one single block of work, in compensation for which he receives a wage. In the wage-labor, therefore, even the part of the work that is unpaid *seems* to be paid. Marx even warns that the sharp distinction that he makes between the necessary and the surplus labor in capitalism is only of a heuristic purpose. In the actual labor process, right from the beginning, in every minute and every second of the labor process, there is an intermingling of the necessary and the surplus labor, such that it is not possible to dissociate the one from the other.<sup>29</sup>

#### 1.4.2 *Equality Is Posited by Domination*

For Hegel, the structure of semblance is contradictory. Semblance exists; however, not as something positive that can exist apart from essence, but as something that is sublated or negated within essence. The same point holds for Marx. The semblance of equality, or the sphere of circulation in general, exists; however, not as something positive that can exist apart from the totality of capital, but as something that gets sublated or negated

<sup>29</sup> The point that semblance and essence interpenetrate such that it is not possible to dissociate the former from the latter also helps us critique one common misreading of Marx. According to this common misreading, Marx's critique of the ideology of equality and freedom consists in him showing that, although the individuals are *legally* free and equal, they are *materially* unfree and unequal. This view – namely the view that regards individuals to be free and equal *in one aspect* and unfree and unequal *in another aspect* – is, of course, correct. But if this was all that Marx could offer, his critique would not be particularly incisive, or even for that matter interesting. In this view, the fact of freedom and equality is not *systematically* related to the fact of unfreedom and inequality. Rather, the two are only externally added together. Such external addition implies, firstly, that it is possible in capitalism to have legal freedom and equality without unfreedom and inequality (say, through fair distribution of material resources), and, secondly, that it is possible to have unfreedom and inequality in capitalism without legal freedom and equality (say, through having slavery in developed capitalism). Marx's commitment to the organic conception of totality outright precludes these two possibilities.

in it. In an important passage in *Capital* that serves as a conclusion to his argument, Marx writes that

It is quite evident from this that the law of appropriation or of private property, laws based on the production and circulation of commodities, turns into its direct opposite through its own internal and inexorable dialectic [schlägt . . . durch seine eigne, innere, unvermeidliche Dialektik in sein direktes Gegenteil um]. The exchange of equivalents, the original operation with which we started, is now turned round in such a way that there is only a seeming exchange [zum Schein ausgetauscht wird], since, firstly, the capital which is exchanged for labor-power is itself merely a portion of the product of the labor of others which has been appropriated without an equivalent; and, secondly, this capital must not only be replaced by its producer, the worker, but replaced together with an added surplus. The relation of exchange between capitalist and worker becomes a mere semblance belonging only to the process of circulation [ein dem Zirkulationsprozeß angehöriger Schein], it becomes a mere form, which is alien to the content of the transaction itself, and merely mystifies it. The constant sale and purchase of labor-power is the form; the content is the constant appropriation by the capitalist, without equivalent, of a portion of the labor of others which has already been objectified, and his repeated exchange of this labor for a greater quantity of the living labor of others. (MEW 23: 609, C I: 729–30)

Note the contradictory formulations that Marx uses in this passage to articulate the semblance of equality as *both* existent *and* nonexistent. Capitalist production requires the law of exchange of equivalents, but at the same time negates this law.<sup>30</sup> Moreover – and this is another point – for Marx, like Hegel, the sublation or negation of semblance in essence is *complete*, and not partial. The equality that obtains through market transactions “turns into its direct opposite” in its completeness, since the money with which the capitalist pays the wage of the worker on the basis of equality of exchange is already accumulated through past labor of other

<sup>30</sup> In an influential article, Norman Geras, while referring to the same passage quoted above, accuses Marx of “dialectical wizardry.” According to Geras, there are two different senses of equivalence involved here, one with regard to the sphere of circulation, and the other with regard to the sphere of production. Since the affirmation of the first and the negation of the second are consistent with each other, Geras maintains, there cannot be any dialectics, and thus “Marx cannot really mean what he says” (Geras 1984: 52–53). Geras is too quick to dismiss dialectics as a mere “prevarication” that only “muddies the water,” and does not consider the fact that by dialectical contradiction Marx does not mean contradiction as conceived by traditional logic. Contrary to Geras, it is important to accept and assert the dialectical contradiction of ideology, in this case, that equivalence obtains in the realm of circulation, and the same equivalence is undermined once it is viewed from the point of view of the totality of capital; otherwise we would lose the distinct conception of ideology in the Marxian tradition as the interfolding of truth and falsity.

workers. With respect to the individual worker, the analysis shows that it is the surplus labor that is appropriated without exchange. But with respect to the class of workers and the class of capitalists, the *whole* working day is appropriated without exchange.<sup>31</sup>

#### 1.4.3 *Equality Is Posited by Domination as Domination's Own Presupposition*

For Hegel, essence requires ("presupposes") semblance, but at the same time essence produces ("posits") this very presupposition. The same point holds for Marx. The relation of domination of capital requires ("presupposes") equality, since it is solely through market transactions that capitalist exploitation can occur. This "presupposition," however, is not external to capital. It is not the case that capital simply *finds* the equality available, and *then* comes onto the scene to use it. Rather, capital is a self-maintaining and self-reproducing social system that is able to generate ("posits") its necessary presupposition. At the end of each production cycle, the worker is coerced to exert his freedom and equality through making a new transaction in the labor-market, mainly because the product of his labor has been expropriated from him, and he remains as much without access to the means of production as before.<sup>32</sup>

In closing, I would like to reiterate the three desiderata that I set for Marx in the beginning of the chapter, in order for his critique of ideology to be considered successful. Marx needs to explain (1) why people in capitalism intuitively believe that they are equal and free, (2) why such belief in equality and freedom in capitalism is illusory, and finally, (3) why despite the illusory character of such belief people continue to hold it. Now, having explained Marx in fair detail, we can see that he does indeed successfully fulfill the three desiderata: (1) People in capitalism intuitively believe that they are equal and free, because they must engage in market transactions, which necessarily presuppose equality and freedom.<sup>33</sup> (2) The

<sup>31</sup> It is worth emphasizing that for Hegel the standpoint of the logic of being is the standpoint of *individuals* who relate to each other atomistically. By contrast, the class analysis obtains from the standpoint of totality, and accords with Hegel's logic of essence.

<sup>32</sup> In the *Grundrisse*, Marx several times uses the language of "positing" and "presupposing" to describe the structure of capital. See especially MEW 42: 180–87, G 255–63. I will discuss the self-maintaining and self-reproducing nature of the totality of capital in detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>33</sup> One more passage on this point from the *Grundrisse* is worth quoting: "Equality and freedom are thus not only respected in exchange based on exchange-values but, also, the exchange of exchange-values is the productive, real basis of all *equality* and *freedom*" (MEW 42: 170, G 245). Note that Marx here does not make a historically invariant claim about the basis of equality and freedom as such; rather he makes a historically specific claim about their basis *in capitalism*. That is to say, in

belief in equality and freedom is illusory, since the market is only a moment of the totality of capital. The market transactions – which seem to embody equality and freedom from the point of view of the market – turn out to embody inequality and unfreedom from the point of view of the totality of capital. (3) Despite the illusory character of equality and freedom, individuals continue to hold those beliefs, since the totality of capital reproduces itself, independently of individuals, and thereby forces individuals to continuously sustain their belief in equality and freedom

capitalism, the intuitions of equality and freedom are derived from the omnipresence of the act of exchange, and must thus be analyzed in relation to exchange. That Marx has a historical view of our intuitions of equality and freedom is evident from the rest of the same passage, where he distinguishes the modern form of equality and freedom from the ancient form: “Equality and freedom as developed to this extent are exactly the opposite of the freedom and equality in the world of antiquity, where developed exchange-value was not their basis, but where, rather, the development of that basis destroyed them.” See also Lohmann (1991: 276–77) for a discussion on this point.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Opposition*

In recent years, Axel Honneth has undertaken a project of “normative reconstruction” of Hegel’s social and political philosophy in the *Philosophy of Right* on the basis of the concept of “recognition.”<sup>1</sup> From the point of view of social ontology, recognition implies (1) that there are no individuals prior to and independent from the relation obtaining between them, and (2) that the relation between individuals is reciprocal. Importantly, Honneth regards the reciprocity involved in recognition to be symmetrical.<sup>2</sup> This implies that the recognizer and the recognizee depend on and determine each other to the same extent. Thus, it is supposed that individuals in the recognitive state are equal to each other: A holds B accountable for the claims that B makes to the same extent that B holds A accountable for the claims that A makes.

Arguably, such a normative conception of symmetrical recognition does not do justice to contemporary realities, where the relations between individuals are structurally saturated with domination. For example, the relationship between a particular capitalist and a worker employed by him cannot be, even remotely, symmetrical. This has nothing to do with the moral integrity of the capitalist in question, but is rather to do with the institutional and economic organization of capitalism, which produces and maintains the relation of asymmetry. As Marx has shown, the function of capital necessarily causes massive unemployment. Within the capitalist framework, the unemployed, taking on the form of an “industrial reserve army,” significantly reduce or entirely eliminate the bargaining power of workers. This economic arrangement makes workers inherently

<sup>1</sup> It is worth mentioning that, for Honneth, all major institutions of the bourgeois-capitalist social order have recognition as their constituting principle: “The ethical sphere contains different classes of actions that are distinct in themselves but are *all* marked by the common quality of being able to articulate a certain form of reciprocal recognition” (Honneth 2010: 51, my emphasis).

<sup>2</sup> Honneth explicitly uses the word “symmetry” to describe the relation of recognition. See, for example, Honneth (1995: 122, 128).

subordinate to capitalists; if ever a worker insists on his demands, the capitalist can simply replace him with one of those in the “reserve.”

Honneth regards reciprocal relations that are based on domination simply as cases of “nonrecognition” or “misrecognition.” Thus, he clearly implies there is a strict dichotomy between relations characterized by recognition and relations characterized by domination; and so he effectively bans the inclusion of domination within the recognitive structure. In this way, Honneth conceives of relations of domination as “social pathologies,” which are mere aberrations from the otherwise healthy norms of the bourgeois-capitalist social order. While recognition constitutes the basis of sociality in this social order, such cases of nonrecognition or misrecognition spark a “struggle for recognition” which has the potential to restore the normal recognitive structure.<sup>3</sup>

It is appropriate to emphasize that the view that Honneth represents – the view that holds recognition to be symmetrical – has become widespread in current scholarship on Hegel. According to Robert Pippin, the “conditions of successful agency” for Hegel

cannot be satisfied unless individuals are understood as participants in an ethical form of life, *Sittlichkeit*, and finally in a certain historical form of ethical life, in which such relations of recognition can be *genuinely mutual*, where that means that the bestowers of recognition are themselves actually free, where the intersubjective recognitional (sometimes called “communicative”) relation is sustained in a *reciprocal* way. (Pippin 2007: 67, my emphases)

Similarly, Robert Brandom holds that “recognition is an equivalence relation.” He argues that “*reciprocal* (that is, *symmetric*) recognition” (original emphases) is a “necessary condition” for an individual’s recognition of himself as an individual; symmetrical recognition is therefore constitutive of the individual:

Insofar as recognition is *de facto* not *symmetric*, it cannot be *reflexive*. I cannot be properly self-conscious (recognize myself) except in the context of a recognition structure that is *reciprocal*: insofar as I am recognized by those I recognize. (Brandom 2007: 137)

<sup>3</sup> In a more recent essay, Honneth (2012) explicitly admits that he has previously defined recognition in exclusion to domination. In order to remedy this defect, now he proposes that the ideological instances of recognition, which secure social domination, must be distinguished from recognition in its normal, healthy, function. However, he still regards such ideological instances of recognition as being infrequent, and sees them as aberrations from recognition in its normal state, thereby reiterating the dichotomy between recognition and domination in a different register.



It is certainly true that, for Hegel, a reciprocal [gegenseitig] relation is a necessary condition for reflexivity, and reflexivity is that which constitutes the individual qua individual. Yet, by conflating reciprocity with symmetry, Brandom, like Honneth and Pippin, plainly assumes that the recognitive relation is devoid of power.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, it must be noted that contrary to Honneth's (and Pippin's) reconstruction of the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel himself does not develop his social and political philosophy in a way that centrally involves recognition.<sup>5</sup> And when we turn to the official locus of Hegel's discussion of recognition, namely, the dialectic of lordship and bondage in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, we readily notice that recognition is addressed, not in exclusion of domination, but emphatically in tandem with domination. Here I do not aim to discuss the relation between recognition and domination in the dialectic of lordship and bondage. Instead, and within the framework of this book, I use the chapter on "determinations of reflection" [Reflexionsbestimmungen] to explicate the inherently asymmetrical relation between individuals in the logic of essence.

Given the subject matter of the *Science of Logic*, in his exposition of the determinations of reflection Hegel does not refer to recognition, or to any other explicitly social or political issues. Rather, as I will show, he discusses the general "logical" structure of individuals, and he does so solely through examining the relations between individuals. Although I will not ground this claim here, the logic of the determinations of reflection in the *Science of Logic* is akin to the logic that underpins the relation between lord and bondsman in the

<sup>4</sup> Pippin's and Brandom's cases, however, are more nuanced than Honneth's, as it seems that both Pippin and Brandom grant that the relation of domination is already a relation of recognition, but maintain that such a case of recognition is not a "true" or "successful" recognition (Pippin), or is a "defective" form of recognition (Brandom). Despite the difference, however, Pippin and Brandom are very close to Honneth, insofar as all three regard the symmetrical relation of recognition as the basis of unity in modern society, from which the asymmetrical relation of domination is a deviation. See also Pippin (2008: 185–86).

<sup>5</sup> It is true that in the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel occasionally uses the concept of recognition – for example, in order to make the transition from the institution of "property" to "contract" (§71), or to describe the formal relation between sovereign states (§331) – but those passages are rather marginal and usually address the abstract relation between individuals (or states). Indeed, the building block of the book is "free will," which Hegel elaborately discusses without any reference to recognition (§5 through §27). At the very least, this lack of textual evidence casts doubts on those interpretations of the book that mainly focus on recognition. Pippin's construal of Hegel's social and political philosophy on the basis of recognition can be found in Chapters 7 through 9 of his book *Hegel's Practical Philosophy* (Pippin 2008). For a critique of the centrality of recognition in Hegel's social and political philosophy, see Peperzak (2001: especially 139–42).

*Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>6</sup> Our present focus on the *Science of Logic* is even more justified in virtue of the fact that the experiential content of the *Phenomenology*, and Hegel's discussion of self-consciousness, desire, and labor within the context of the dialectic of lordship and bondage, might distract us from the current project of fleshing out the social ontology inherent in relations of domination.

In the chapter "determinations of reflection," Hegel discusses the structure of individuals through various relations that obtain between individuals. These relations include "identity" [Identität], "difference" [Unterschied], "diversity" [Verschiedenheit], "opposition" [Gegensatz], and "contradiction" [Widerspruch]. I will argue that Hegel's discussion of the determinations of reflection establishes (1) that there is no pre-relational individual. Rather, individuals are solely constituted in and through relations; (2) that the most fundamental form of relation between individuals is the relation of opposition; and (3) that the relation of opposition, in its developed form, is essentially asymmetrical. As the asymmetrical relation is a relation of power, these claims together demonstrate that – contrary to Honneth, Pippin, and Brandom – for Hegel power is not external to the structure of the individuals, but is constitutive of it. As I will show, for Hegel the asymmetry that obtains through the relation of opposition has a complex structure. Namely, it does not obtain in exclusion of symmetry and equality, I argue, but has a necessary moment of symmetry and equality built into it. Such symmetry and equality function as an illusion – indeed as a constitutive illusion – that conceals the asymmetrical relation of power.<sup>7</sup>

In what follows, I begin with a general account of the determinations of reflection, what they are, and how they are interrelated (Section 2.1). The dialectical development of the determinations of reflection shows us how opposition, as well as the contradiction that ensues from it, constitutes individuals (Section 2.2). I then discuss why opposition is essentially

<sup>6</sup> Since Hegel never wrote a distinct "logic" of the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, there is an unsettled controversy about the nature of this logic, especially because he wrote the *Science of Logic* later (1812/13) and with a different conception (see Heinrichs 1974). I do not want to enter into this discussion here, but I hope through this chapter the reader will realize that the logic of determinations of reflection in the *Science of Logic* is very similar to the logic that underpins the relation between lordship and bondage.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth mentioning that Iris Marion Young has also criticized Honneth's exclusion of power from recognitive relation. Young discusses the first form of recognition for Honneth, namely, love in the sphere of family, and argues, contra Honneth, that "the relation between caring adult and child . . . is necessarily asymmetrical – because the care receiver depends on the caregiver in a way that the giver does not depend on the receiver" (Young 2007: 207). While I definitely agree with Young, my approach is quite distinct from hers, as she does not engage in any logical analysis of the relation of recognition.

asymmetrical and thus a relation of domination (Sections 2.3 and 2.4). Thereafter, by bringing in Croce's charge that Hegel disregards diversity in favor of opposition, I discuss what it means that for Hegel opposition is the "truth" of diversity (Section 2.5). I will then discuss how Hegel's conception of opposition underpins Marx's conception of the relation of capital and labor (Section 2.6), and MacKinnon's conception of gender formation (Section 2.7). Finally, a brief conclusion compares how Honneth's view and Hegel's view in the logic of essence necessarily have divergent political implications (Section 2.8).

## 2.1 The Fundamentality of Opposition

In order to understand Hegel's strategy in discussing determinations of reflection, in the first step it is helpful to remind ourselves of what Hegel means by "reflection." In the logic of essence, reflection does not denote a subjective activity of reflection, which takes a certain content, that which is reflected upon, as independent from reflection. Rather, Hegel here talks of "reflection in general" [Reflexion überhaupt], which is a process of relationality that is *immanent* to all things or individuals, and constitutes them as what they are (WL II: 30, SL 404). Hegel defines reflection as the "*movement from nothing to nothing and so back unto itself*" [*Bewegung von Nichts zu Nichts und dadurch zu sich selbst zurück*] (WL II: 24, SL 400, original emphasis). What Hegel means by this seemingly enigmatic formulation is that reflection is a relation that does not presuppose any independent, or "given," things or individuals. Rather, "reflection is *pure mediation* as such" [*reine Vermittlung überhaupt*], while "pure mediation is *pure relation*, without any related terms" [*reine Beziehung, ohne Bezogene*] (WL II: 81, SL 445, original emphases).

By grounding the logic of essence on reflection, Hegel develops an ontology which is based on the priority of relations over things and individuals. As Lukács has emphasized, this is indeed *the* "revolutionary act" of Hegel's philosophy (GLW 13: 533). While the history of metaphysics had previously been directed in general by Aristotle's metaphysics of substance, wherein things and individuals are conceived to have priority over relations, Hegel's logic *derives* the structure of things and individuals from relations. For Hegel, it is not the case that *first* there are some individuals, which *then* relate to each other; rather the individuals, from the beginning, are constituted in and through the relation that obtains between them.<sup>8</sup> It is

<sup>8</sup> As we have learned, the logic that takes the individuals ultimately as given, the logic which roughly accords to Aristotelian metaphysics of substance qua hypokeimenon, is the first part of the objective

therefore appropriate to designate Hegel's ontology in the logic of essence as "the ontology of absolute relationality."<sup>9</sup> This, however, does not mean that Hegel is a Heraclitean philosopher; that is to say, Hegel is not one who regards everything to be in a state of constant flux such that no ontological identity could possibly obtain. For Hegel, there *are* individuals, but these individuals are solely derived from the relations that obtain between them. The task of the determinations of reflection is precisely to capture the structure of individuals through relations.

Hegel's discussion of the determinations of reflection begins with the relation of "identity," and then continues to the relation of "difference," and ultimately concludes with the relation of "contradiction." "Difference" itself is conceived in two ways: the difference that is "external" or "indifferent," which Hegel calls "diversity," and the difference that has a "determinate" form, which is "opposition." The determinations of reflection, according to Hegel, are "categories" that "are *valid for everything*" (WL II: 36, SL 409). They can thus be expressed in propositional form in the following way:

- (1) Identity: "Everything is identical with itself;  $A = A$ ," or its negative expression: "A cannot at the same time be A and not A." (EL §II5, WL II: 36, SL 409)
- (2) Diversity: "Everything is diverse," or its negative expression: "There are no things that are perfectly equal to each other." (EL §II7, See also WL II: 52, SL 422)
- (3) Opposition: "Everything is opposite" (EL §II9Z), or "Everything is an opposite, is determined either as positive or as negative." (WL II: 73, SL 438)
- (4) Contradiction: "Everything is inherently contradictory." (WL II: 74, SL 439)

Hegel criticizes representational thought in that it merely "enumerates them [i.e., these categories] *one after the other*"; so that there does not appear

logic – what Hegel refers to as the logic of being. The task of the logic of being is primarily critical; through this logic, Hegel aims to show that, *if* we take the individuals as pre-relational, that is, as simply given, then we fail to determine them – in the determination of individuals through the logic of being, there always remains some residue that cannot be conceptually accounted for. The collapse of the logic of being paves the way for the ontology of absolute relationality that Hegel develops in the logic of essence. Hegel explicates the distinction between the logic of being and the logic of essence in this way: "In the sphere of being, relatedness is only *in itself*; by contrast, in essence it is posited. This is then in general the difference between the forms of being and those of essence. In being, everything is immediate; in essence, by contrast, everything is relational" (EL §III Z).

<sup>9</sup> See also Iber (1990), where the same thesis is defended.

to be any relation between them" (WL II: 38, SL 411). By contrast, Hegel argues that the "truth" of the determinations of reflection "consist *only* in relation to one another" (my emphasis). These categories for Hegel are in a strong sense internally interrelated, such that "each in its very concept contains the others" (WL II: 73, SL 438). This implies that for Hegel everything is at the same time identical, different, diverse, opposite, and contradictory.

However, this claim – that each of the determinations of reflection contains the others – does not mean that for Hegel they are the same. Rather, he thinks there is a *progressive* dialectical movement from identity, to difference, to opposition, to contradiction, such that contradiction should be considered as the one that is "deeper and more essential" [das Tiefere und Wesenhaftere]. The proposition of contradiction, he emphasizes, "in contrast to others expresses more the truth and the essence of things" (WL II: 74, SL 439). Thus, although the determinations of reflection are all interconnected, there is, to adopt a term from Klaus Hartmann, a "Steigerungs-Kaskade" (escalating cascade) from identity, to difference, to diversity, to opposition, to contradiction (Hartmann 1999: 179). Hegel himself uses the term "zuspitzen" (i.e., to sharpen, to pinnacle, to come to the point) to describe this dialectical progression. What is already present in its "blunt" [abgestumpft] form in identity and diversity gets its "sharpened" form in opposition and contradiction, which are the most adequate determinations of reflection and make all things, Hegel asserts, "lively" and "active" (WL II: 78, SL 442).

Later, I will argue (1) that contradiction for Hegel is an identity, which is achieved through opposition, and (2) that opposition is principally an asymmetrical relation of power. These two claims, together with the claim already mentioned, that is (3) that contradiction expresses the "truth" of the determinations of reflection, establish that Hegel's ontology, developed through the determinations of reflection, is an ontology of power. That is, for Hegel, power is not external to the structure of individuals, but is constitutive of them. In other words, individuals become individuals in the first place through being in a relation that is fundamentally and in its most sharpened truth a relation of power; and this is, then, to say that individuals become individuals through being either dominating or dominated. Clearly, this conclusion has radical social implications, some of which I will discuss later. For now, in order to understand how Hegel proves the fundamentality of the relation of opposition, and the contradiction that ensues from it, we need to closely track

the dialectic of the determinations of reflection. This is the task to which I now turn.

## 2.2 The Dialectic of the Determinations of Reflection

In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel describes the general method of dialectical progression in his logic as “nothing other than merely the *positing* of what is already contained in a concept” (EL §88). It is only through adherence to the principle of making explicit what is already implicit in a category, Hegel thinks, that the “*necessary* progression” of categories can be established. In what follows, I detail how Hegel grasps the necessary progression from (1) identity to difference, (2) to diversity, (3) to opposition, and finally (4) to contradiction.

### 2.2.1 From Identity to Difference

According to Hegel, in the relation of identity  $A = A$ , the first  $A$  (which comes before the identity sign) is different from the second  $A$  (which comes after the identity sign). The first  $A$  *identifies* itself with the second  $A$ . But the second  $A$  is *being identified* with the first  $A$ . That is, in the very expression of the proposition of identity, the proposition of difference is already implied.<sup>10</sup> Note that it is not the case that *first* there is identity to which difference is *then* added. Rather, the act of identification of (the first)  $A$  with (the second)  $A$  is *at the very same time* the act of differentiation of (the first)  $A$  and (the second)  $A$ . This means that identity and difference are entirely integral to each other.

### 2.2.2 From Difference to Diversity

Now, Hegel holds that difference implies that there are other individuals, from which  $A$  can be distinguished. This results in the relation of diversity, namely the relation between  $A$  and (say)  $B$ , which is a variation of the relation of difference. The two individuals that are in the relation of diversity are identical with each other *in some respect* and different from each other *in some other respect*, but the internal unity of such identity and difference cannot be grasped. For this reason, in the framework of diversity, for Hegel, identity and difference remain “external” and “indifferent” to each other, and to that extent the diverse individuals remain indeterminate (EL §117, WL II: 48, SL

<sup>10</sup> Hoffmann (2012: 337).

419). To give an example, if we understand the relation of races in terms of diversity, we can say that a black American and a white American are identical with each other, with respect to their both being American, and that they are different from each other, with respect to the color of their skin. However, in this way, the property of either white or black and the property of American are only pasted together externally, and the relation between the two merely remains a relation of indifference.

Hegel's considered view is that within the framework of the relation of diversity, we should talk of the "likeness" [Gleichheit] of individuals instead of their identity, since the concept of identity implies that the individuals are equal in *all* respects, rather than that they are equal in only *some* respects. Correspondingly, in diversity Hegel conceives of difference in terms of "unlikeness" [Ungleichheit].<sup>11</sup> Likeness and unlikeness are therefore not identity and difference proper, but "external identity" and "external difference" (WL II: 49, SL 419, EL §117). The externality of likeness and unlikeness implies that the individual in the relation of diversity is conceived as having an underlying substratum, to which the relations of likeness and unlikeness to other individuals are *then* attached. That is, in diversity, there is a relapse to the traditional ontology of the logic of being, which regarded things as having priority over relations. It is exactly for this reason that Hegel calls the type of reflection involved in the relation of diversity a "reflection alienated from itself" [sich entfremdete Reflexion]:

In reflection thus alienated from itself, likeness and unlikeness appear as mutually unrelated, and in relating them to *one and the same* thing, it separates them by the introduction of "*in so far*," of *sides* and *respects*. The diverse, which are one and the same, to which both likeness and unlikeness are related, are therefore *from one side* like each other, but *from another side* are unlike, and *insofar as* they are alike, they are not unlike. *Likeness* is related only to itself, and similarly *unlikeness* is only unlikeness. (WL II: 50, SL 420)

While the relation of identity and difference proper are constitutive of individuals, likeness and unlikeness only exist, Hegel emphasizes, for an "external" or "third standpoint" which "compares" [vergleichen] the one with the other. That is, likeness and unlikeness are not immanent to individuals, but only obtain through an act of comparing, which is "a subjective activity that falls outside" the individuals (WL II: 51, SL 421).

We can now understand why Hegel thinks the relation of diversity is inadequate: diversity renders individuals pre-relational and indeterminate.

<sup>11</sup> "Gleichheit" and "Ungleichheit" can also be translated as "equality" and "inequality." Since in this book I have translated "Gleichgültigkeit" as "equality," I use "likeness" for "Gleichheit."

In diversity, individuals are arbitrarily compared: *one time*, they are regarded as alike, and *another time*, they are regarded as unlike. In this way, likeness and unlikeness remain externally and indifferently related to each other; that is to say, each falsely proposes itself as self-standing and unrelated to the other (“*Likeness* is related only to itself, and similarly *unlikeness* is only unlikeness”). The transition from diversity to opposition is motivated by the quest for full determination of individuals. In order to determine the individuals, Hegel believes, it is essential to conceive likeness and unlikeness in their unity. This will result in the relation of opposition, which I discuss below.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.2.3 From Diversity to Opposition

We have learned that the relation of identity (between A and A) presupposes the relation of diversity (between A and B). In a further dialectical move, Hegel wants to show that the relation of diversity, in its turn, presupposes the relation of opposition. The relation of opposition obtains between what Hegel calls the “positive” and the “negative,” and can be captured in terms of the relation between +A (or simply A) and –A. (Note that the “positive” in this context should not be confused with the mere

<sup>12</sup> Hegel’s critique of the relation of diversity can be read as a critique of the language of equality/inequality that forms a focal point of discussion in liberal political philosophy. (To make it even more explicit, one can translate “*Gleichheit*” as “equality” and “*Ungleichheit*” as “inequality.”) It is interesting to observe that Marx and Engels were also both extremely critical of any political agenda whose primary aim was equality. For Marx and Engels, the language of equality/inequality is too abstract to be philosophically meaningful and politically helpful. People are always equal in some respect, and unequal in another respect, and if we aim to reduce inequality in one respect, it might well increase inequality in another respect. The language of equality and inequality, as Hegel’s logic shows us, presupposes an atomistic ontology, and it is this ontology that Marx and Engels were fundamentally against. A worthwhile political agenda must aim at radical transformation of social *relations*, which constitute the individuals in the first place. See especially Marx’s critique of the program of the Social Democratic Workers’ Party of Germany in his *Critique of the Gotha Program* (MEW 19: 20ff, MECW 24: 86ff). Also Engels’s letter to Bebel, March 1875, where he criticizes the same program: “‘The elimination of all social and political inequality’, rather than ‘elimination of all class differences,’ is similarly a most dubious expression. As between one country, one province and even one place and another, living conditions will always evince a *certain* inequality which may be reduced to a minimum but never wholly eliminated. The living conditions of Alpine dwellers will always be different from those of the plainsmen. The concept of a socialist society as a realm of *equality* is a one-sided French concept deriving from the old ‘liberty, equality, fraternity,’ a concept which was justified in that, in its own time and place, it signified a *phase of development*, but which, like all the one-sided ideas of earlier socialist schools, ought now to be superseded, since they produce nothing but mental confusion, and more accurate ways of presenting the matter have been discovered” (MEW 34: 129, MECW 24: 71). For helpful discussions regarding Marx’s critique of equality, see Geuss (2008: 76–80) and Wood (2014: Chapter 11).



given, as the terms “positive social sciences” or “positivism” may refer to. There is no such givenness in the logic of essence. Here positive and negative are both relational terms.) In the relation of opposition, Hegel writes,

What is different does not have an *other in general* [nicht ein *Anderes überhaupt*], but *its* own other [sondern *sein* *Anderes*] confronting it, that is to say, each has its own determination only in its relation to the other; it is only in itself reflected insofar as it is reflected into the other, and the other likewise; thus each is the other's *own* other. (EL §119, underline mine)

In the relation of diversity, any *arbitrary* individual (such as B, C, D, etc.) can function as the other of A, but in the relation of opposition, the other of A is only  $-A$ , and not any other individual. Likewise the other of  $-A$  is only A and not any other individual. In other words, within the relation of opposition, the law of the excluded middle holds: “*something is either A or not A; there is no third*” (WL II: 73, SL 438).

Hegel defines the positive and the negative in terms of a relation that obtains between likeness and unlikeness. Whereas in the relation of diversity, likeness and unlikeness simply refer to two aspects of individuals and fall apart from each other, in the relation of opposition, likeness and unlikeness form a unity. “Diversity whose *indifferent* sides are just as much simply and solely *moments* of one negative unity is *opposition*,” Hegel writes (WL II: 52, SL 421). In order to understand how likeness and unlikeness strongly cohere with each other in the relation of opposition, let us focus on the definitions of the positive and the negative. Importantly, although the positive and the negative are defined solely in relation to each other, they are defined differently from each other. According to Hegel, “the self-*likeness* reflected into itself that contains within itself the relation to unlikeness is the positive; and the *unlikeness* that contains within itself the relation to its non-being, to likeness is the negative” (WL II: 56, SL 424, Hegel's emphases). That is, in the positive, the moment of self-likeness is the defining feature, and the unlikeness to the negative is only for the sake of securing the identity of the positive. In contrast, in the negative, the moment of self-unlikeness is the defining feature, and self-likeness has a subordinate importance.<sup>13</sup> As the formulation of the *Encyclopedia* has it, the positive is “the identical relation to self in such a way that it is

<sup>13</sup> See also Longuenesse (2007: 64).

not the negative,” and the negative is “what is different on its own account in such a way that it is *not* the positive” (EL §119). That is, in the positive, the emphasis is on self-identity, and in the negative, the emphasis is on difference from the positive. We can depict the relation of the positive and the negative in the following way:

The Positive – The Negative

*Likeness–Unlikeness – Likeness–Unlikeness*

As this formulation shows, for Hegel the positive and the negative are second-order relational structures that consist of two relational moments of likeness and unlikeness. This is in sharp contrast with the logic of being, where the individuals are ultimately defined atomistically, as individuals that have a core untouched by relation to others. Here in the logic of essence, it is not the case that *first* the individuals are given, and only *then* do they enter into a relation of opposition; rather the individuals are *derived* from the relation of opposition that obtains between them.

#### 2.2.4 *From Opposition to Contradiction*

In the literature on Hegel, there is an abundant emphasis on the concept of contradiction. Given the centrality of contradiction in Hegel’s philosophy, this emphasis is appropriate. Nonetheless, the focus on contradiction itself may draw our attention away from the *genesis* of contradiction through opposition. My emphasis on opposition is justified when we consider that the transition from opposition to contradiction is minimal. Indeed, contradiction is already contained within opposition;<sup>14</sup> since each of the positive and the negative consists of two moments of likeness and unlikeness, which *simultaneously* cohere *and* exclude one another. According to Hegel, the positive and the negative are self-subsistent individuals that gain their very selfhood *through* their relation to each other; these individuals are entirely co-dependent at the very same time that each purports to exclude the other from itself. This is essentially what Hegel means by contradiction:

As this whole, each [of the opposites] is mediated with itself *by its other and contains* it. But further, it is mediated with itself by the *non-being of its other*; thus it is a unity existing on its own and it *excludes* the other from itself. The

<sup>14</sup> This point is also made by Klaus Hartmann, who maintains that although Hegel treats opposition and contradiction separately, in contradiction “nothing new is added at any rate” to opposition (Hartmann 1999: 188).

self-subsistent determination of reflection that contains the opposite determination, and is self-subsistent in virtue of this inclusion, at the same time also excludes it in its self-subsistence, therefore, it excludes from itself its own self-subsistence [so schließt sie in ihrer Selbständigkeit ihre eigene Selbständigkeit aus sich aus]. . . . It is thus *contradiction*. (WL II: 65, SL 431)

We can also make sense of Hegel's contradiction in the following way. In Hegel's ontology of absolute relationality, which is adequately articulated through the relation of opposition, each individual is solely the *result* of the relation of opposition. Yet, at the same time there must have been, *from the beginning*, individuals between which the relation of opposition could obtain. This state of affairs – where every individual is always already derived from a relation of opposition, while the individual asserts itself as self-subsistent and, as it were, as prior to the relation of opposition – is what Hegel calls contradiction.

Hegel holds that contradiction is “the opposition [that] is reflected into itself” (WL II: 36, SL 409). That is to say, contradiction is the opposition that relates to itself and, in so doing, constitutes itself as a unity. The self-referential character of contradiction makes it an *individual* proper. Thus, in contradiction the individuality of the positive and the negative, the individuality that is already *implicitly* present in the relation of opposition, is *explicitly* attained. We can also infer this point from the architectonic of Hegel's exposition of the determinations of reflection: identity, difference, and contradiction. As the order of the categories suggests, for Hegel the identity that is achieved through difference is contradiction. The fact that the determinate form of difference is opposition clearly indicates that, for Hegel, contradiction is the identity that is achieved through opposition. To put the same point in metaphorical language, we may say that contradiction is an identity which represents the congealment of the process of relationality of opposition, the congealment through which the positive and the negative are constituted as distinct individuals. We shall, therefore, conclude that, whereas the relation of opposition, precisely speaking, obtains *between* two opposing individuals, contradiction occurs *within each* opposing individual – contradiction for Hegel is primarily *self-contradiction*.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> This point – that dialectical contradiction is *self-contradiction* – is well grasped by Adorno: “The concept of contradiction will play a central role here, more particularly, the contradiction in things themselves [in den Sachen selbst], contradiction *in* the concept, not contradiction *between* concepts” (NS-V II: 17, Lectures on the Negative Dialectics: 7).

### 2.3 Opposition as Domination

In the relation of diversity, individuals are *symmetrically* related to each other; each individual is conceived to consist of a substratum, equally shared by all individuals, which ultimately remains untouched by their relation of (external) difference. By contrast, the relation of opposition is a relation of domination, since it is essentially *asymmetrical*. Whereas the positive is a *self-centered* individual that relates to the negative only subordinately, the negative is a *de-centered* and *disjointed* individual that is defined by difference from its center in the positive.<sup>16</sup> In order to illustrate this point, it is helpful to invoke de Beauvoir's conception of women as the "second sex." According to de Beauvoir,

The terms *masculine* and *feminine* are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of *man* to designate human-beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. (de Beauvoir 1989 [1952]: xxi)

And even more explicitly:

Thus humanity is male and man defined woman not in herself, but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. . . . She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the absolute – she is the other. (de Beauvoir 1989 [1952]: xxii)<sup>17</sup>

In the relation of diversity, there is a third standpoint, an "impartial spectator" (Adam Smith's phrase) so to speak, from which the diverse individuals are compared. The criteria by means of which the diverse individuals are compared are located, precisely speaking, not in individuals themselves, but in the third nonsituated "neutral" standpoint. Hegel's

<sup>16</sup> This conception of the positive and the negative is similar to Hegel's discussion of lord and bondsman in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. From the logical point of view, the lord and bondsman reciprocally mediate each other, yet it is the lord that is eventually self-centered. Hegel defines the lord and bondsman in the following way: "One is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is the lord, the latter is the bondsman" (PhG §189, Miller's translation).

<sup>17</sup> When de Beauvoir claims that there is no reciprocity between men and women, or that women are only the inessential, one should not take her claim quite literally. There is of course a reciprocal relation between men and women – and for this reason, both are essential – yet this reciprocity is asymmetrical. De Beauvoir shows she is totally aware of this point when she writes "here is to be found the basic trait of woman: she is the other in a totality of which the two components are necessary to one another" (de Beauvoir 1989 [1952]: xxvi).

analysis of the relation of opposition shows us that such a “neutral” standpoint is a mere figment of imagination; it is not objective *in* the individuals. Rather, the so-called neutral standpoint is the positive itself. It is the positive that provides the criteria both for itself and for the negative. In de Beauvoir's words, “man is at once judge and party to the case” (de Beauvoir 1989 [1952]: xxxiii).

The asymmetrical relation of opposition is not limited to the case of men and women. Indeed, the social world is permeated with such relations of power. Just to give a few examples, in international relations it is the central capitalist countries that are the positive and the self-alike, and the peripheral countries that are the negative and the self-unlike. In race, it is white that is the positive and the self-alike, and black that is the negative and the self-unlike. In the realm of economy, it is the capitalists that are the positive and the self-alike, and the workers that are the negative and the self-unlike.

I have explained that the positive and the negative are both contradictory, in that each contains the other as its own constitutive moment, yet excludes it at the same time. It is important to emphasize that, corresponding to the asymmetrical relation between the positive and the negative, the contradiction that obtains in the positive is distinct from that of the negative. According to Hegel, “the positive is only *implicitly* [*an sich*] the contradiction, whereas the negative is contradiction *posited*” (WL II: 66, SL 432). Contradiction in the positive is implicit, since the positive is primarily defined in terms of its identity, which is subordinately contrasted to difference. In contrast, the contradiction of the negative is explicit, since its very identity is primarily defined in terms of non-identity, in terms of difference from the positive. In order to illustrate this point, it is helpful to bring in Marx's conception of the relation of opposition between capital and labor, which in his early work the *Holy Family* (1845) he conceptualizes in the following way:

Proletariat and wealth are opposites; as such they form a single whole. They are both creations of the world of private property. The question is exactly what place each occupies in the opposition. It is not sufficient to declare them two sides of a single whole. Private property as private property, as wealth, is compelled to maintain *itself*, and thereby its opposite, the proletariat, in *existence*. That is the *positive* side of the opposition, self-satisfied private property. The proletariat, on the contrary, is compelled as proletariat to abolish itself and thereby its opposite, private property, which determines its existence, and which makes it proletariat. It is the *negative* side of the opposition, its restlessness within its very self, dissolved and self-dissolving private property. (MEW 2: 37, MECW 4: 35–36, original emphasis)

According to Marx, thus, the workers and capitalists (in this passage, the “proletariat” and “wealth”) constitute a relation of opposition; the capitalists are the “positive” that are primarily self-identical (“self-satisfied”), and the workers are the “negative” whose identity is formed through their very difference (“restlessness within its very self”). The capitalists and the workers are both essentially contradictory, yet the former gets power through the contradiction that is constitutive of it, while the latter becomes powerless through its contradiction. As both are enmeshed in relations of power, both are alienated from what makes them human beings; yet the mode of alienation of each of them is distinct from that of the other:

The propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-estrangement. But the former class feels at ease and strengthened in this self-estrangement, it recognizes estrangement as *its own power* and has in it the *semblance* of a human existence. The latter feels annihilated in estrangement; it sees in it its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence. It is, to use an expression of Hegel, in its abasement the indignation at that abasement, an *indignation* to which it is necessarily driven by the contradiction between its human *nature* and its condition of life, which is the outright, resolute and comprehensive negation of that nature. (MEW 2: 37, MECW 4: 36)<sup>18</sup>

It is important to emphasize that for Hegel, as well as for Marx, although the positive is in the position of power, it is the negative that is associated with “activity” and “liveliness” (Hegel’s phrases) – an activity that can potentially change the relations of power. This theme is explicitly formulated in the lord–bondsman dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where the bondsman (or the negative) eventually, through his labor, manages to abolish the relations of power that are constitutive both of the master (or the positive) and of himself. Similarly, for Marx, it is the “positive” that is associated with conservation of power-relations, whereas the “negative” is potentially disruptive. Marx writes that “within this opposition, the private property-owner is therefore the *conservative* side, the proletariat the *destructive* side. From the former arises the action of preserving the

<sup>18</sup> It would be going too far to immediately identify Marx’s conception of the relation of opposition between the capitalists and the workers in this passage with the Hegelian one. In Marx’s early writings, the concept of “alienation” presupposes a distinct understanding of “human nature” as a being that realizes self through work. However, from the perspective of Hegel in the logic of essence, there is no pre-relational human nature, and if there is anything such as human nature it is solely derived from social relations. Marx himself later arguably abandoned the idea of grounding his theory on the concept of human nature. His theory in *Capital* is primarily based on the analysis of social *relations*, which is quite consistent with the ontology of absolute relationality in Hegel’s logic of essence.

opposition, from the latter the action of annihilating it" (MEW 2: 37, MECW 4: 36).<sup>19</sup> That Hegel ascribes true agency to the negative is evidence that Hegel's philosophy – despite its occasional reputation for being conservative – is revolutionary at its logical core. Since my concern in this book is to set out the logical *structure* of domination in capitalism, I leave the question of *agency* aside. It is needless to emphasize that any such conception of emancipatory praxis presupposes an adequate understanding of the dynamics of power, and should have as its starting point concerns similar to the concerns of this book.

## 2.4 . . . and the Logical Proof for It

In this section, I focus on the dialectical development of the relation of opposition in order to show how Hegel proves that the relation of opposition in its developed form is essentially asymmetrical. In doing so, I also show how equality and symmetry are integrated within the structure of power that obtains in the relation of opposition.

Consider the following two groups of examples of the relation of opposition: (1) One group includes the relation between up and down, right and left, north and south, east and west, etc. (2) The other group includes the examples that I mentioned in the previous section, namely, the relation between capitalists and workers, between men and women, between central capitalist countries and the peripheral ones, etc. In both groups, there is a relation of opposition between relata; each relatum is related, not to some *arbitrary* others (in plural), but to *its own* singular other, such that its (east, men) negation immediately results in the other relatum (west, women). Yet there is a distinct difference between (1) and (2), namely, it is only in (2) that the relation of opposition is explicitly *asymmetrical*. That is, it is only in (2) that the relation of power is being stabilized and secured.

Indeed, Hegel's dialectical exposition of the relation of opposition goes through two consecutive stages that correspond to the two groups of examples that were considered above. Importantly, (1) and (2) are not simply two varieties of the relation of opposition that exist side-by-side each other. Rather, type (1) for Hegel is "the empty opposition of the Understanding" which "has its place in the context of such abstractions as number, direction, etc." (EL §119), while in the more concrete instances,

<sup>19</sup> See also Marx's claim in the *Poverty of Philosophy*: "It is the bad side [i.e., the negative] that produces the movement which makes history, by providing a struggle" (MEW 4: 140, MECW 6: 174).

such as in the spiritual and social relations, the relation of opposition is of type (2).<sup>20</sup> From a logical point of view, there is a progression from (1) to (2), such that (2) expresses the relation of opposition more adequately. Hegel's exposition of the relation of opposition in the main text (WL II: 55–59, SL 424–27) is different from the Remark (WL II: 60–64, SL 427–31), but the content is the same. In the main text, he conceives of (1) as “opposition in itself” and (2) as “opposition in and for itself.” In the Remark, in (1) he regards the positive and the negative equally as “opposite as such” [Entgegengesetzte überhaupt], whereas in (2) he regards the positive as “the non-opposed” [das Nichtentgegengesetzte], and the negative as “the opposed” [das Entgegengesetzte]. In the following, I give a short account of the dialectical progression from (1) to (2).<sup>21</sup>

#### 2.4.1 “Opposition in Itself” or the “Opposite as Such”

The hallmark of the relation of opposition in this, first, stage – that is, for example, between “6 miles in an easterly direction” and “6 miles in a westerly direction” (Hegel's example, EL §119) – is that the positive and the negative can be “exchanged” with each other. In the relation between east and west, either of east or west can be equally considered as the positive or the negative.<sup>22</sup> According to Hegel, whether east is positive or negative does not belong to the constitution of east itself, but it is only from an external point of view that it is regarded as positive or negative. The indifferent exchangeability of relata and their indeterminacy make the relation of opposition in this stage similar to the relation of diversity. Indeed, Hegel calls the relata of this relation “diverse opposites” [die entgegengesetzte Verschiedene]:

This opposition, therefore, is not regarded as having any truth in and for itself, and though it does belong to diverse sides, so that each is simply an opposite, yet, on the other hand, each side exists indifferently on its own, and it does not matter which of the two diverse opposites is regarded as positive or negative. (WL II: 60, SL 428)

<sup>20</sup> One other example of the relation of opposition of type (2) is the relation of spirit and nature. Spirit and nature are interdependent – neither can exist without the other. Yet, the interdependence involved is asymmetrical. For Hegel, nature is primarily *external* to itself and exists *for* spirit (EL §119Z).

<sup>21</sup> My account is indebted to Michael Wolff's insightful treatment of the subject (Wolff 1981, 1986), yet it is different from it in one crucial point, as will become clear later.

<sup>22</sup> “Although one of the determinacies of positive and negative belongs to each side, they can be changed around [sie können verwechselt werden], and each side is of such a kind that it can just as well be taken to be positive as it can to be negative” (WL II: 58, SL 426).



In the Remark, Hegel analyzes the relation of “diverse opposites” to one another in the following way: the positive and the negative are “on the one hand, merely opposite as such” and “on the other hand,” they are “indifferent” toward each other (WL II: 62, SL 429). Thus, in the relation of “6 miles in a westerly direction” and “6 miles in an easterly direction,” the two, on the one hand, are “merely opposite” insofar as they sublate each other, and on the other hand, they are “indifferent” to each other, insofar as they are “simply 6 miles of way or space.”<sup>23</sup> To formulate it with a mathematical language, as Hegel himself does, “+a” and “-a” is an oppositional pair. Insofar as they confront each other, they are “opposition as such,” but insofar as each is “a” (without plus or minus sign), they are “indifferent” to each other:<sup>24</sup>

The +a and -a are *simply opposite magnitudes*; the *a* is the *unity that stands in-itself* at the base of both [zum Grunde liegende *ansichseiende Einheit*] – itself indifferent towards the opposition and serving here as a dead base [tote Grundlage] without further conceptual consideration. The -a is indeed designated as the negative, the +a as the positive; but *the one* is just as much an *opposite* as *the other*. (WL II: 60, SL 428)

As we see in this passage, Hegel calls the “a” which underlies “+a” and “-a” the “unity that stands in-itself at the base” of the opposites. Michael Wolff calls this underlying unity the “reflection-logical substratum” [das reflexionslogische Substrat] (Wolff 1981: 113ff). I find this terminology unfortunate, as the term “substratum” might be associated with an Aristotelian hypokeimenon, which is a being that lies underneath, thereby independent from, the properties or relations of an individual. Yet, as Wolff correctly emphasizes, the reflection-logical substratum does not exist independently from the relation of opposition; rather it is derived from such a relation. In other words, it is not the case that *first* there is a substratum, to which *then* the character of the positive or the negative is added; but the so-called substratum is *already* produced through the relation of opposition – hence the term *reflection-logical* substratum.

<sup>23</sup> Another example of Hegel is credit and debt. Insofar as they reciprocally sublate each other, they are “opposition as such.” But insofar as each is “a sum of money,” they are “indifferent” to each other (WL II: 61, SL 428).

<sup>24</sup> Wolff has shown that the “a” here (without plus or minus sign) is tantamount to the “absolute value” in algebra. Interestingly, according to Wolff, the concept of “absolute value” appears in mathematics in the nineteenth century, contemporaneous with Hegel (Wolff 1981: 91f).

2.4.2 “Opposition in-and-for-Itself” or the “Opposed”  
and the “Not-opposed”

The relation of “opposition in itself” is not adequately determinate. Firstly, the two relata can *indifferently* be exchanged with each other. Secondly – and this point is related to the first – the constitution of relata consists of a reflection-logical substratum that relates to the positive or to the negative *indifferently*. In the second dialectical move, Hegel maintains that it is wrong to conceive of the reflection-logical substratum as a “dead base” that lies underneath the positive and the negative: rather – and I cannot over-emphasize this point – we should see that the so-called reflection-logical substratum is the positive itself. In other words, the common basis of the positive and the negative is not a common substratum that is equally detached/attached from/to them; instead, the basis is the positive itself. According to Hegel, this truth is also expressed in mathematics, since “a” in mathematics is identical to “+a” (WL II: 62, SL 429). With this second dialectical move, we have the adequate conception of the relation of opposition that I explained in the previous section. The positive, Hegel writes in the Remark, is the “nonopposed” that is primarily self-identical, and the negative is “the opposed” that gets defined primarily in relation to the positive.

The move from conceiving of the reflection-logical substratum as a neutral ground underlying the opposites to conceiving it as the positive itself is not explicitly addressed by Wolff. For this reason, his account falls short of understanding the relation of opposition as an asymmetrical relation of power. This move also shows how we should understand the relation of equality as an integral moment of the relation of power involved in opposition. The positive and the negative are equal with each other and have a symmetrical relation with each other, since they share the same reflection-logical substratum. Nonetheless, they are at the same time in a relation of power, since the reflection-logical substratum is nothing but the positive itself. This means that the relation of equality of the positive with itself is imposed upon the negative; the negative is what it is only by conforming to the relation that the positive establishes within itself.

This conception of the interrelation of power and equality is extremely helpful for understanding modern structures of power, where the claims of equality have become common cultural assets across the world. In contrast to premodern times, men and women are equal with each other; yet – as we will see in more detail later – the terms of such equality are defined by men. Consider also the relation of lord to serf in feudalism or master to slave in

ancient Greece or Rome; neither socioeconomic order allowed for claims of equality. In modernity, by contrast, capitalist and worker, or employer and employee are equal with each other. We must notice, however, that it is in their very equality that they are unequal; it is the capitalist or the employer that ultimately defines the terms of equality (obtained in a contract). Finally, and more broadly speaking, notice that the equality assured by law can provide no guarantee against the relation of power; although the powerful are (ideally) circumscribed by the equality under law, nonetheless, the powerful are those who write and enforce the law. We should grasp, then, that neither equality nor reciprocity implies symmetry – power is both consistent with and essential to a variety of modern systems that propound equality.

### 2.5 The “Truth” of Diversity in Opposition

In *What Is Living and What Is Dead of the Philosophy of Hegel*, Croce identifies the source of what is dead in Hegel in “confusion of the theory of the different and the theory of opposites,” which “produces the gravest results; that is to say, from it arises . . . all that is philosophically erroneous in the system of Hegel” (Croce 1984 [1915]: 99). According to Croce, reality, which is a pluralistic order, is constituted by the principle of difference. The problem with Hegel is that he forcefully applies his dialectical method, which according to Croce is based on the relation of opposition, to everything, including to those parts of reality that do not have an antagonistic character. Croce does not deny that there exists antagonism and opposition in reality; what he denies is the universality of antagonism and opposition. Thus, he writes, “the organism is the struggle of life against death; but the members of the organism are not therefore at strife with one another, hand against foot, or eye against hand” (Croce 1984 [1915]: 93).

Croce's criticism is acute, yet misses what Hegel is getting at. Hegel never denies that there is a relation of diversity in reality. As we may recall, his point is rather that the “truth” of diversity is opposition, that diversity morphs into opposition, and thus opposition is “deeper” and “more essential” than diversity. In order to illustrate this point, let us consider the process of class formation, according to Marx. A classic statement of Marx's view can be found in his *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

The small-holding peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with one

another. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. The isolation is increased by France's bad means of communication and by the poverty of the peasants. Their field of production, the smallholding, admits of no division of labor in its cultivation, no application of science and, therefore, no manifold development, no variety of talent, no wealth of social relationships. Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient; it itself directly produces the major part of its consumption and thus acquires its means of life more through exchange with nature than in intercourse with society. A smallholding, a peasant and his family; alongside them another smallholding, another peasant and another family. A few score of these make up a village, and a few score of villages make up a department. In this way, the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes. Insofar as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition [*feindlich gegenüberstellen*] to the latter, they form a class. Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organization among them, they do not form a class. (MEW 8: 198, MECW II: 187–88)

I have taken the liberty to quote this long passage, as it vividly shows how for Marx class is constituted by the relation of opposition. The peasants are self-sufficient, and each is isolated from the other. In logical terms, their relation is the relation of diversity: they are *alike* insofar as they share the commonality of being peasants; they are *unlike* insofar as each is bound up with a different geographical, agricultural, and social context. As long as they remain in the relation of diversity, they are merely like potatoes that are thrown into a sack. That is to say, their unity is only an external unity, a supposed unity existing only from the point of view of a social scientist or an "impartial spectator." The peasants, however, become a full-fledged class only when they act collectively, and they can act collectively *only* insofar as they find themselves in opposition to other classes. Marx emphasizes that "the separate individuals form a class only insofar as they have to carry on a common battle against another class" (MEW 3: 55, MECW 5: 77). Elsewhere, he writes that the aggregate of individuals who have a common social standing is only a class-in-itself; it is only "in the struggle" against other classes that "this mass becomes united and constitutes a class for-itself" (MEW 4: 181, MECW 6: 211). And it is worth emphasizing that for Marx there is always a real potentiality that the aggregate of individuals would mutate into a class, even if the individuals in fact remain a mere

aggregate. Or in Hegel's language, the "truth" of their diversity is opposition, even if they *de facto* remain in a relation of diversity.

The example of the affinity of the political to the oppositional<sup>25</sup> directs us to a second reason why Croce's conception of Hegel is wrong. Namely, contrary to Croce, Hegel's dialectical logic is not meant to apply to all spheres of reality in the same way and to the same degree. Rather, Hegel believes, as it were, in degrees of dialecticity in reality. Opposition as the most determinate form of the determinations of reflection is the category that best captures the essence of the political in human societies. In the realm of nature, by contrast, opposition is not the primarily relevant determination of reflection. Rather, nature consists of entities that remain "dispersed" with regard to each other. The dispersion inherent in nature, for Hegel, signifies "the impotence of nature" [*die Ohnmacht der Natur*] to exhibit the rich conceptual array that can be adequately instantiated only in human societies. And accordingly Hegel insists that it would be foolish to take the richer categories that are appropriate only to the realm of spirit, and uncritically apply them to the realm of nature.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, contrary to Croce, for Hegel there is no confusion between diversity and opposition. Diversity and opposition both exist; yet especially in the social and political world, there is an objective tendency for diversity to "sharpen" into opposition, and so opposition should be conceived as "more essential" than diversity. The transition from diversity to opposition is motivated by the quest for "further determination" [*Fortbestimmung*] in order to abolish the indeterminacy inherent in the relation of diversity. I have explained the transition from diversity to opposition before, but I would like to emphasize that Hegel's argument for the priority of opposition over diversity is not limited to the few pages of the chapter on the determinations of reflection in the logic of essence. The main argumentative work about why external relations cannot be adequately determining occurs throughout the logic of being, and that argument is

<sup>25</sup> I cannot pursue the relation of dialectical opposition and politics in more detail here. For a helpful discussion, see Furth (2006 [1991]). Furth argues that there is a "certain structural homology between dialectics and politics," insofar as in both cases the main problematic is concerned with how unity obtains through opposition (227).

<sup>26</sup> (1) "It would be unphilosophical to try to show that a form of the Concept exists universally in nature in the determinateness in which it is as an abstraction. Nature is rather the Idea in the element of asunderness, so that like the Understanding it, too, holds fast to the moments of the Concept in their dispersion, and represents them thus in reality; but in higher things the differentiated forms of the Concept are unified to the extreme of concretion" (EN §312). (2) "It is the impotence of nature that it cannot adhere to and exhibit the rigor of the Concept" [*die Strenge des Begriffs nicht festhalten und darstellen zu können*] (WL II: 282, SL 607).

already presupposed in the logic of essence.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, and this is even more important, the priority of opposition to diversity is not limited to the discussions in the logic. Hegel's philosophy, in general, is a philosophy of negation and negativity. One prominent feature of negation in all its variations is contrastive exclusion. The relation of opposition expresses the truth of contrastive exclusion more adequately than the relation of diversity; since the relata in the relation of opposition are *solely* constructed through moments that mutually exclude each other.

## 2.6 Opposition between Capital and Labor

In this section, I flesh out the logical underpinnings of Marx's conception of the relation of capital and labor in his 1844 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. It is true that Marx's economic theory in this period is crude, but its bare logical bones arguably remain the same in his later work. Especially because Marx explicitly uses Hegel's terminology in this period, it is easier to trace the Hegelian origins of his thought. In the said manuscripts, Marx jots down the relation of "private property" (or "capital") and "labor"<sup>28</sup> with some key words:

The character of *private property* is expressed by labor, capital, and the relations between these two. The movement through which these constituents have to pass is:

*First. Unmediated or mediated unity of the two.*

Capital and labor are at first still united. Then, though separated and estranged, they reciprocally develop and promote each other as *positive* conditions.

[*Second.*] *The two in opposition*, reciprocally excluding each other. The worker knows the capitalist as his own non-being, and vice versa: each tries to rob the other of his being.

[*Third.*] *Opposition* of each to itself. Capital = stored-up labor = labor . . .

*Hostile reciprocal opposition.* [*Feindlicher wechselseitiger Gegensatz*] (MEW 40: 529, MECW 3: 289)

Although these notes are very schematic, they contain the kernel of Marx's critique of labor relations in capitalism. According to Marx, private property and labor in some archaic prehistorical period are still united; those who work also own the property that they produce ("unmediated unity"). Then comes (the merely logical or perhaps historical) period in which

<sup>27</sup> Wallace (2005: 180).

<sup>28</sup> Note that in this period, Marx has not yet distinguished "labor" from "labor-power," a distinction that is pivotal for his later work. But that does not matter for our current purpose.

private property and labor are in a harmonious relation, in that each is necessary for the other and each cooperates with the other in a way that benefits both ("mediated unity"). In capitalism, however, the relation of capital and labor is one of antagonistic reciprocal dependence and exclusion ("hostile reciprocal opposition"), an antagonistic exclusion that simultaneously constitutes each as a self-contradiction ("opposition of each to itself").

In order to understand why in capitalism there cannot be a harmony of interests between capital and labor, we need to know that Marx's account of capitalism is based on the labor theory of value, namely, the theory that the economic value of commodities is *solely* derived from the labor that is put into their production. Simply owning means of production does not create *any* value. It is only labor that creates value. Moreover, even the value of the means of production that are owned by the capitalists is *already* the "stored up" past labor of the workers. In the capitalist economic setting, which is based on private ownership of the means of production, although the commodities are produced by the workers, from the very moment of their production, they belong to the capitalists. Labor, therefore, *constitutes* capital, which at the same time *excludes* it from itself. In Hegel's language, labor is the "negative" that primarily exists for capital (the "positive"), and can thus constitute itself *only* in this negative relation. Marx writes that

As soon, therefore, as it occurs to capital (whether from necessity or caprice) no longer to be for the worker, he himself is no longer for himself: he has *no* work, hence *no* wages, and since he has no existence *as a human being* but only *as a worker*, he can go and bury himself, starve to death, etc. The worker exists as a worker only when he exists *for himself* as capital; and he exists as capital only when some *capital* exists *for him*. The existence of capital is *his* existence, *his life*; as it determines the tenor of his life in a manner indifferent to him. (MEW 40: 523, MECW 3: 283)

All these fit well with Marx's claim that in capitalism, *all* labor – and not only the labor that is done in assembly lines in sweatshops – is alienated; since the institutional arrangement in capitalism is such that those who work do not own the means of production, and therefore the products of their labor immediately belong to the owners of the means of production.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Although I cannot discuss it in detail here, it is worth mentioning that Marx's conception of the antagonistic relation of capital and labor in capitalism does not exclusively rely on the labor theory of value. In her *An Essay on Marxian Economics* (1942), the Cambridge economist Joan Robinson argues that Marx's labor theory of value is untenable, and yet his account of exploitation – the view that the products of labor are systematically robbed from the workers by the capitalists – remains true all the same (Robinson 1966). Moreover, the nature of Marx's theory of value in his later work is

It is helpful to compare Marx's conception of the relation of capital and labor with current discussions dominant in the realm of distributive justice. In general, the theories of distributive justice presuppose the wealth of society as *given*, and *then* try to come up with some criteria of fairness according to which the presupposed wealth should be distributed among the members of society. Therefore, in theories of distributive justice the statement "A has more money than B" can only be criticized on moral grounds – there is no account that systematically links the wealth of A to the poverty of B. Marx, however, shifts the main question from the *distribution* of wealth to the *production* of wealth. Within capitalism, wealth is always produced by a group of people only to be expropriated by another group. According to Marx,

The opposition between *lack of property* and *property*, so long as it is not comprehended as the opposition of *labor and capital*, still remains an indifferent opposition, not grasped in its *active connection*, in its *internal relation*, not yet grasped as a *contradiction*. (MEW 40: 533, MECW 3: 294–95)

In theories of distributive justice, the wealth of A and B can only be subject to external comparison, and is thus to be taken as an instance of Hegel's relation of diversity, which Marx in the quoted passage calls "indifferent opposition." For Marx, however, there is an "active connection," an "internal relation" between the wealth of A and the poverty of B, such that each is constituted *solely* through the other, thereby forming a relation of opposition and contradiction. In other words, in Marx's account, the statement "A has more money than B" – as Elster argues – is tantamount to the statement "A *exploits* B" or "A's wealth is the *cause* of B's poverty."<sup>30</sup>

Marx's conception of the relation of capital and labor as oppositional has been constantly under attack. Let us now consider one prominent criticism of Marx on this issue. According to the Hegelian philosopher Klaus Hartmann, Marx's "abstract" and "categorical" analysis of the relation of capital and labor does not allow any room for considering the "concrete plurality" of that relation in empirical settings. It is possible, for Hartmann,

highly controversial, inasmuch as some people even deny that Marx in *Capital* has a labor theory of value at all (Backhaus 1997, Morishima 1973).

<sup>30</sup> Elster's comments on the same quoted passage of Marx (Elster 1985: 93ff). He also makes a helpful reference to Marx's later "Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner," where Marx in passing distinguishes between "to stand in a relationship" [in einem Verhältnis zu stehen] and "to relate actively" [sich aktiv zu verhalten] (Elster 1985: 64ff). Although Elster, aiming to systematically undermine Marx's inheritance from Hegel's logic, does not state it, it can arguably be shown that the former is similar to Hegel's relation of diversity, and the latter to the relation of opposition.



that in a concrete setting the abstract relation of opposition between labor and capital would morph into a balance or equilibrium that is beneficial to *both* labor *and* capital (Hartmann 1970: 164–68). As an example (my example), some argue that in those underdeveloped countries where the rate of unemployment is high, the investment of foreign capital is beneficial for both labor and capital: it is beneficial for labor, since people may get a job (although poorly paid), which otherwise they wouldn't; it is beneficial for capital, since it can hire workers with lower wages than in the developed countries, thereby increasing its profit. The relation of capital and labor in this way is no longer a relation of antagonism, but a relation of mutual cooperation.

Moreover, once we take into account the totality of social relations in modern society, Hartmann continues, we realize that the initial relation of opposition can indeed be mitigated, domesticated, or altogether modified into other sorts of relations. Most importantly, the political state, by regulation of the labor market and imposition of taxes, can implement strong redistributive programs that eventually would benefit the workers. According to Hartmann, given that such measures do change the status of workers, it is not clear why we must still think of the relation of capital and labor in terms of opposition. From the logical point of view, Hartmann holds, Marx's analysis is based on the logic of essence, which is the logic of alienation and opposition. Contrary to Marx, however, the intervention of the modern state abolishes such alienation and opposition, and implements the transition to Hegel's logic of the Concept, in which all individuals equally attain the status of "concrete universality." The logic of essence, therefore, is nothing but a transitory stage that is superseded in the logic of the Concept.

Hartmann's arguments, in spite of having a strong intuitive appeal, are not effective against Marx.<sup>31</sup> We must note, firstly, that the variation of *empirical* setting does not affect the *logical* truth of the relation of capital and labor. From a Marxian standpoint, which is consistent with Hegel's logic of essence, such empirical variety in capitalism is only a seeming, an illusion that conceals the more fundamental, oppositional, state of affairs.

<sup>31</sup> Hartmann seems to be aware that these arguments are not effective against Marx. Yet he regards the sealed "transcendental" character of Marx's argument, which makes it immune to such criticism, as a reason why Marx's argument as a whole should be considered as a *petitio principii*. According to Hartmann, Marx presupposes that capitalism is based on the logic of essence, only to prove that it is so (Hartmann 1970: 165). I cannot discuss this point here, but the circularity of transcendental arguments does not necessarily mean that they commit a *petitio principii*, or at least so is the case with Marx's analysis.

No matter how the empirical setting in capitalism may change, it does not touch the basic point that still it is the workers that produce value, which at the same time is expropriated from them by capital.

Secondly, Hartmann's objection is based on the Hegelian idea that the political state in modernity is successfully able to tame and contain the sphere of civil society, thereby providing a milieu in which each individual would enjoy freedom to the same extent that others do. I will discuss Marx's critique of Hegel's conception of the state in capitalism in the Conclusion to the book, and here a brief remark should suffice. According to Marx, the capitalist state primarily reflects the antagonistic character of civil society. The political state exists in capitalism, Marx holds, because it stabilizes and maintains the sphere of civil society. Indeed, Marx conceives the *political* freedom and equality that obtains through the state to be nothing but another symptom of the alienation of life in civil society. The existent *political* freedom and equality indicates that the antagonism inherent in the "real" or the material life of people cannot be solved, and has to be seemingly annulled in the "ideal" world of politics. Moreover – and this is another point – even if the state manages to *redistribute* wealth to a considerable extent, it cannot change the mode of *production* of wealth, which solely obtains through the antagonism between capital and labor. Thus, Marx unequivocally argues against the motto of "equalization of classes" that had gained momentum among the liberal socialists of his time:

The "equalization of classes," literally interpreted, comes to the "*harmony of capital and labor*" so persistently preached by the bourgeois socialists. It is not the logically impossible "*equalization of classes*," but the historically necessary, superseding "*abolition of classes*," this true secret of the proletarian movement, which forms the great aim of the International Workers' Association. (MEW 16: 349, MECW 21: 46)

Our discussion makes clear both the importance and the limits of the logic, when it comes to thinking about social issues. Logic is, relatively speaking, *both* independent from *and* dependent on social reality. It is independent, insofar as it provides the foundation for the social reality; it captures what is "actual" in social reality independent of the manifold empirical manifestations. It is dependent, insofar as it is already informed by social and political arguments that are not necessarily logical in character. It is not for logical reasons that, for Marx, the transition from the logic of essence to the logic of the Concept cannot transpire; rather, as I will

discuss at the end of the book, the social and historical institutions in capitalism are such that they would not allow such a transition. It is not the “matter of the logic” [die Sache der Logik] that defines the social world, Marx emphasizes, but indeed the “logic of the matter” [die Logik der Sache] (MEW 1: 216, MECW 3: 17–18).

## 2.7 . . . and between Genders

I have indicated that de Beauvoir's conception of the relation of men and women has a close affinity with Hegel's relation of opposition. In this section, I focus on Catharine MacKinnon's conception of gender formation, as primarily explained in her essay “Difference and Dominance: On Sex Discrimination” (MacKinnon 1987a). MacKinnon explicitly articulates the relation of men and women in terms of domination, and pushes de Beauvoir's argument to its logical conclusion. Given the centrality of domination in her account, it is not surprising to observe how her account fits well into Hegel's conception of opposition in the logic of essence, even if she does not mention Hegel at all.

MacKinnon begins her essay with the query “What is a gender question<sup>32</sup> a question of?” This query, she holds, can be answered in two ways: in terms of (1) “sameness and difference” or (2) “dominance” (MacKinnon 1987a: 32). Understanding gender issues in terms of sameness and difference is the prevailing approach, against which MacKinnon offers her own approach of dominance.

(1) According to the sameness/difference approach, “sex *is* a difference, a division, a distinction, beneath which lies a stratum of human commonality, sameness” (MacKinnon 1987a: 33). This approach undergirds the existing liberal legal and moral framework: insofar as men and women are equal, the law should be gender-neutral, disregarding the gender of the person in question; and insofar as women are different from men the law should accommodate the difference, and should take affirmative action to compensate for it. According to MacKinnon, there is a fundamental flaw in this approach:

Under the sameness standard, women are measured according to our [women's] correspondence with man, our equality judged by our proximity

<sup>32</sup> MacKinnon does not subscribe to the distinction between “sex” (that is based on biology) and “gender” (that is socially constituted), which is of pivotal importance for many second-wave feminists, and uses the terms “sex” and “gender” interchangeably. For her, there is no brute natural fact that defines sex; sex is socially mediated through and through. See Allen (2014).

to his measure. Under the difference standard, we [women] are measured according to our lack of correspondence with him, our womanhood judged by our distance from his measure. Gender neutrality is thus simply the male standard. (MacKinnon 1987a: 34)

There is, in other words, no neutral point of view from which it can be judged in what respects women and men are the same, and in what respects they are different. Rather, that supposedly neutral standpoint is the male standpoint. MacKinnon gives a poignant example to illustrate her point: in anatomy classes in medical school, a male body is considered to be *the* human body, and the additional organs that women have are studied in ob/gyn. Similarly, according to MacKinnon, sports are generally defined with reference to men's physiology, car and health insurance coverage with reference to men's needs, and successful career patterns with reference to men's biographies. There is no such neutral standpoint for the evaluation of so-called successful women; these women are, in general, those who have been able to construct a CV that is close to the male norm. As the sameness/difference approach is blind to the "hierarchy of power" between men and women, it does not realize that "maleness is the referent for both." (MacKinnon 1987a: 34–37). The sameness/difference approach claims to treat men and women equally. Yet, as the criteria for such equality are defined by men, equality can never obtain. Thus, within the framework of sameness/difference, MacKinnon emphasizes, "sex equality is conceptually designed never to be achieved" (MacKinnon 1987a: 44).

(2) In reaction to the conceptual inconsistency involved in the sameness/difference approach, MacKinnon offers her own approach, according to which the question of gender is primarily the question of domination of men over women:

There is a matter of dominance, not difference. [. . .] Another way to say that is, there would be no such thing as what we know as sex difference [. . .], were it not for male dominance. Sometimes people ask me, "Does that mean you think there is no difference between women and men?" The only way that I know how to answer that is: of course there is; the difference is that men have power, and women do not. (MacKinnon 1987b: 51)

It is power, which through constructing social reality, derivatively produces the so-called sameness and difference between sexes. For MacKinnon, the difference between men and women is not a difference

that designates an equal value, but a difference constituted by the relation of power. For her, the relation of power precedes gender: it is not the case that *first* there are self-standing genders, upon which the relation of power is *afterwards* superimposed; rather, gender from the beginning is constituted by power: "Gender might not even code as difference, might not mean distinction epistemologically, were it not for its consequences for social power" (MacKinnon 1987a: 40).<sup>33</sup>

These two approaches in understanding social reality have radically different practical significance. From the point of view of the sameness/difference approach, "sex inequality would be a problem of mere sexism, of mistaken differentiation, of inaccurate categorization of individuals" (MacKinnon 1987a: 42). In other words, in the sameness/difference approach the status quo as a whole is regarded as just, as the standard, and the issue is merely identifying the aberrant forms of sex discrimination and sexism. From the point of view of the dominance approach, MacKinnon believes, the sameness/difference approach "invisibly and uncritically accepts the arrangements under male supremacy." In this sense, she concludes, the sameness/difference approach is masculinist, although it might be expressed by women themselves (MacKinnon 1987a: 43). In contrast, for the dominance approach the issue of inequality is not an idiosyncrasy or an exception. Rather, the inequality of power is that which makes genders what they are. Thus, the dominance approach focuses on the "systemic dominance" of men over women. Correspondingly, its focus is on "politics," whose horizon is changing the *totality* of relations, not the individual cases of supposedly explicit sexism.

The resemblance of MacKinnon to Hegel is obvious. I will content myself with a brief summation of her points appropriately couched in Hegel's language: (1) For MacKinnon gender is not a biological entity, originating from some *thing* like DNA, brain, hormones, genitalia, etc., but is fundamentally *relational*. (2) The sameness/difference approach regards the relation between male and female as an instance of the relation of *diversity*. According to this approach, men and women are *in some respects* equal, and *in some other respects* unequal. This is an instance of relation of *indifference* and *externality*, where each of the two *relata* ultimately exists independently from the other. (3) The dominance approach

<sup>33</sup> Or, as she puts it metaphorically: "On the first day that matters, dominance was achieved, probably by force. By the second day, division along the same lines had to be relatively firmly in place. On the third day, if not sooner, differences were demarcated, together with social systems to exaggerate them in perception and in fact, because the systematically differential delivery of benefits and deprivations required making no mistakes about who was who" (MacKinnon 1987a: 40).

understands the relation between men and women as an instance of relation of *opposition*, where the *positive* is male, and the *negative* is female. The very categories of male and female are *contradictorily* derived from the relation of power of male over female. (4) The relation of dominance of male over female has an in-built relation of *equality* as its moment, insofar as male and female are equal with each other – obviously – under the rules that the male sets.

## 2.8 Conclusion

Let us conclude this chapter by returning to Honneth's account. According to Honneth's "normative reconstruction" of Hegel's social and political philosophy, in the bourgeois-capitalist social order the basic form of social relation that obtains between individuals is recognition. For Honneth, recognition is essentially symmetrical, and the asymmetries of power are mere aberrations from the recognitive state. For him, the symmetry involved in recognition renders individuals equal with each other. Although there are always cases of inequality, equality remains real. By contrast, in the view that is developed here through Hegel's conception of determinations of reflection, things look quite different. In this view, the basic form of social relation that obtains between individuals is opposition. This relation is essentially asymmetrical, and based on power. There is equality involved in the relation of opposition, yet the measure of such equality is always established by those who are already in power. This equality, therefore, can never be a true equality. It is rather a constitutive illusion that conceals the relations of power.

Corresponding to these two conceptions of social ontology inherent in the bourgeois-capitalist order, there are two distinct kind of politics, which, following Nancy Fraser, we may call "affirmative" and "transformative" (Fraser 1995: 82ff). The view that holds that the totality of social relations in capitalism is by and large the embodiment of recognition ends up in a kind of politics whose primary aim is to redress the explicitly identifiable instances of misrecognition or nonrecognition. This kind of politics is affirmative, since it leaves the deeper institutional structure of society largely undisturbed. Indeed, by shifting our attention away from the underlying source of domination toward its end-state outcomes, the affirmative politics effectively supports, and reinforces, the deeper structure. We must emphasize, moreover, that the affirmative politics cannot in principle have stable effects – whenever a blatant instance of injustice in one place and time is redressed, it pops up again and again elsewhere.

The second view, by contrast, holding that the underlying structure of society in capitalism is essentially ridden with opposition and domination, cannot rest content with merely engaging with end-state outcomes. Rather, it has to adopt a “transformative” politics, namely a kind of politics that aims at remedying the so-called social pathologies by transforming the deeper structure or totality that in fact generates them.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> A final note: even if my reading of Honneth in this chapter may strike some readers as simplifying, it is not, I believe, a falsifying simplification. Rather, it is a simplification that crystalizes the main principles of his work. Admittedly, in his later works Honneth takes up a more critical attitude towards capitalist economy (Honneth 2008, 2014: 176–253). Nonetheless, he still argues that the asymmetrical relations of domination in capitalism, manifested in the phenomena of “exploitation” and “enforced contracts,” are not inherent to capitalism; they are rather merely “deviations from the [recognitive] norms underlying the market system” (Honneth 2014: 196).

## CHAPTER 3

### *Totality*

The infinite weak point in every critical position (and I would like to tell you that I include my own here) is that when confronted with such criticism, Hegel simply has the more powerful argument. This is because there is no other world than the one in which we live, or at least we have no reliable knowledge of any alternative despite all our radar screens and giant radio telescopes. So that we shall always be told: everything you are, everything you have, you owe, we owe to this odious totality, even though we cannot deny that it is an odious and abhorrent totality. (Adorno HF 47, NS-V 13: 72)

It is not an exaggeration to claim that almost all recent major attempts at the “re-actualization” of Hegel’s political philosophy, especially in the Anglophone world, have aimed to accommodate him to liberalism.<sup>1</sup> It is true that Hegel is not regarded as a conventional liberal philosopher, who sought to base his theory on some given conception of human nature, or some consequentialist argument based on an account of instrumental reason; nonetheless, it is strongly believed that Hegel provides an “alternative” way for justification of the liberal social and political order.<sup>2</sup>

The major concept used to reconstruct Hegel as a philosopher of liberalism is the concept of recognition. This reconstruction occurs along two lines. (1) The process of recognition (or “communicative freedom”) logically exists prior to individuals, and constitutes them as equal and free. (2)

<sup>1</sup> Liberalism is, of course, an umbrella term for a variety of philosophical and political doctrines, and it is hard to give a precise definition of it. However, there are at least three common elements running through the various brands of liberalism: one, the centrality and inalienability of the rights of individuals; two, the centrality of equality of individuals, where equality is usually understood as equality before the law; and three, the centrality of the freedom of individuals, where freedom is usually understood in negative terms as freedom from interference. The underpinning principle of these three elements is the indispensability of individuality and its priority over social and political institutions. For a helpful discussion of “the unity of the liberal tradition,” see Gray (1995: xi–xiii).

<sup>2</sup> See Pippin (2007).



The relation of recognition is anchored in, and supported by, the major social institutions of capitalist modernity, namely the nuclear family, the market economy, and the political state. By participating in these social institutions, which Honneth dubbs as “the spheres of recognition” (Fraser and Honneth 2003: 143), individuals are able to recognize each other, and be recognized by each other, thereby forming and promoting their own individuality, as well as the individuality of the others. (Indeed, having so much trust in the modern institutions, Honneth unabashedly states that his overall task is “to interpret bourgeois-capitalist society as an institutionalized recognition order” (Fraser and Honneth 2003: 138).)

We can interpret the above two claims about recognition as explaining two types of *symmetrical* or *horizontal* relation: (1) the symmetrical or horizontal relation between individuals, (2) the symmetrical or horizontal relation between individuals and institutions. The idea expressed by (2) is this: social institutions are to a considerable extent malleable by the action of individuals. The institutions do not really “force” individuals to abide by their logic, but they provide sets of “orientation” for individuals to act. Individuals thus can step back from the institutions, reflect on them, and act according to what they themselves deem to be good and desirable.<sup>3</sup> In so doing, individuals can reciprocally change the institutions. Thus, the dialectical relation between individuals in (1) is transformed into “a playing out of the moral dialectic of the universal [i.e., institutions] and the particular” (Fraser and Honneth 2003: 152) in (2), thereby re-enforcing and concretizing the already-existing horizontal relation between individuals.

Interpreting Hegel through the concept of recognition makes Hegel a liberal philosopher, insofar as it regards individuals in capitalism as – although in a roundabout way, through recognition – equal and free. Granted that the philosophers of recognition agree that the current conjuncture in the bourgeois-capitalist order is far from realizing the recognitive relation, they yet stress that recognition is the (ethical) norm underlying this social order, and is indeed already embedded (and “actual”) in it. On the contrary, one of my aims in this book has been to show that no matter the extent of reform, the rules and regularities (i.e., the structural norms) that govern the capitalist order cannot possibly accommodate

<sup>3</sup> See Pinkard (2010: 137), who uses the term “orientation” to describe the function of social institutions with respect to individuals. Contrary to Pinkard, one can even claim that in capitalism, individuals are afflicted – to use a term by Fisher (2009: 21) – by “reflexive impotence.” Namely, if and when they reflect on the main social institutions of capitalism, they only realize that they can apparently do nothing about them and must simply follow their logic.

a recognitive relation between individuals. From the logical point of view, in Chapter 2 I argued against (1). I showed that for Hegel, in the logic of essence the most fundamental form of relation between individuals is not the relation of symmetrical recognition, but the relation of opposition, which is essentially asymmetrical. To complete the argument, in this chapter I aim to undermine (2). Namely, I will show that the relation of social institutions and individuals in capitalism is not in any sense symmetrical, but emphatically asymmetrical. More precisely, I will argue that the social institutions in capitalism, and especially the “totality”<sup>4</sup> thereof, do not merely provide points of orientation for individuals to act; rather, much more strongly, the institutions dictate to the individuals their course of action. My focus is on Hegel’s logic of essence, specifically where Hegel conceives of totality in terms of “substance” [Substanz], which exerts “absolute power” [absolute Macht] over individuals, who remain its “accidents.” The strongly holist argument that Hegel advances in the logic of essence is a good reason why the philosophers of recognition emphatically dissociate Hegel’s political philosophy from his logic. Nonetheless, it is absolutely undeniable that Hegel himself regards the logic as constituting the ground of the *Philosophy of Right* (PR §2, §31, §33). In what is without doubt one of the most important parts of the book, the beginning of the ethical life [Sittlichkeit] (PR §142 through §158, also EG §513 through §517), Hegel repeatedly and clearly identifies the ethical life with “substance.” It is very difficult, one could say even impossible, to square these passages with liberalism. Here Hegel claims that the “substance” of society is self-standing and independent of individuals, that individuals are mere “epiphenomena” of the totality of society, and that the social institutions are “ethical powers” that govern the lives of individuals such that individuals necessarily “disappear” if they do not follow the rules and regularities of the totality of society. Here are some typical passages:

The fact that the ethical sphere is the *system* of these determinations of the Idea constitutes its *rationality*. In this way, the ethical sphere is freedom, or the will, which has being in and for itself as objectivity, as a circle of necessity whose moments are the *ethical powers* [sittlichen Mächte] which govern the lives of individuals. In these individuals – who are accidental to them – these powers have their representation, phenomenal shape, and actuality.

*Addition.* Since the determinations of ethics constitute the concept of freedom, they are the substantiality or universal essence of individuals, who are related to them merely as accidents. Whether the individual exists or not

<sup>4</sup> I use the terms “whole” and “totality” interchangeably, as Hegel, Marx, and Adorno do.

is a matter of indifference to objective ethical life, which alone has permanence and is the power by which the lives of individuals are governed. Ethical life has therefore been represented to nations as eternal justice, or as gods who have being in and for themselves, and in relation to whom the vain pursuits of individuals are merely a play of the waves. (PR §145)

and

In this way, ethical substantiality has attained its right, and the latter has attained validity. That is, the self-will of the individual, and his own conscience in its attempt to exist for itself and in opposition to the ethical substantiality, have disappeared. (PR §152)

Faced with such pivotal and unequivocal passages that reveal the “illiberal” views of Hegel, the philosophers of recognition have resort to essentially two approaches. (1) The approach adopted by Habermas (1973), Theunissen (1982), Hösle (1998), and the earlier Honneth (1995), according to which Hegel in his Jena period developed a “dialogic” theory of intersubjectivity and recognition, but then abandoned it in his Berlin period in the *Philosophy of Right* for a “monological” theory based on metaphysics of substance, where such a move is a “Verfallsgeschichte” (Theunissen’s phrase), a decadence that must be repudiated. (2) The approach adopted by the later Honneth (2010, 2014) and Pippin (2008), among others, who argue that Hegel’s theory of horizontal recognition and intersubjectivity is still pivotal in the *Philosophy of Right*, and that passages such as the ones quoted must simply be ignored in favor of some other (much less explicit) passages that support the horizontal conception of recognition.

By rejecting or ignoring Hegel’s logic of substance, the philosophers of recognition in effect discard what I believe constitutes *the* main aspect of Hegel’s revolution in modern social and political philosophy. It is exactly through conceiving of society as substance that Hegel radically departs from the tradition of liberalism in general and of social contract theory in particular. The philosophers of recognition are wary of using the category of substance, presumably because they think conceiving of society in terms of substance automatically implies the *endorsement* of the notion that individuals are mere accidents, and that as accidents they can simply be replaced by other individuals. Now there is no doubt that, in conformity with his project of the legitimation of bourgeois-capitalist society, in the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel uses the concept of totality or substance *affirmatively*. To clarify, although Hegel conceives of the ethical life as the substance for which individuals remains accidents, nonetheless at the same time he believes that in modernity the ethical life has reached

a maturity that would allow individuals to be self-determining in a genuine way (“The right of individuals to their *particularity* is likewise contained in ethical substantiality” (PR §154)).<sup>5</sup> But one does not necessarily need to use the concept of totality affirmatively: indeed, there is a rich tradition – initiated by Marx and continued by Lukács and Adorno – that uses the category of substance or totality in a *critical* way.<sup>6</sup> According to this tradition, totality provides the basis of sociality in the bourgeois-capitalist social order, and thus should be conceived as *the* central category in social and political philosophy.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, as we will see, Hegel himself uses the concept of substance in a critical way, not in the *Philosophy of Right*, but rather in the *Science of Logic*.

In what follows, I begin with a discussion of Adorno’s conception of society as totality. The discussion of Hegel that follows has two stages: in the shorter, negative part, I criticize two common misconceptions of Hegel’s totality; and in the longer, positive part, I reconstruct Hegel’s conception of totality as it unfolds in the logic of essence. My main aim is to make sense of Hegel’s claim that the totality in its most determinate form, i.e., substance, is indeed “absolute power.” Finally, I discuss how the power of totality is both nonintentional and impersonal, and thus has the character of a blind “fate.” This chapter provides the framework for understanding the totality of capital for Marx, which I discuss in the next chapter.

### 3.1 Society as Totality in Adorno

In the heated philosophical–political dispute in the sixties in West Germany, between the “dialectical” theories of society represented by Adorno and his then assistant Habermas, and the empiricist or so-called positivist theories of society represented by Popper and Albert, perhaps the most decisive point of divergence is the former’s emphasis on the concept

<sup>5</sup> However, this point – that the subjective right of the individual is preserved in ethical life in modernity – does not mean that such a right is formed through the recognitive relation. See Menke (2009) for an illuminating discussion.

<sup>6</sup> The confusion between the *critical* usage of the category of totality and the *affirmative* usage of it lies at the heart of the conservative and conformist reading of Hegel, propounded by the tradition of British Idealism (Bradley, T. H. Green, Bosanquet). A paradigmatic statement is Green’s “To ask why I am to submit to the power of the state is to ask why I am to allow my life to be regulated by that complex of institutions without which I literally should not have a life to call my own, should not be able to ask for a justification of what I am called on to do” (Green 1895: 122, quoted by Pippin 1997: 421).

<sup>7</sup> That the later Habermas and the later Honneth regard the central category of social and political philosophy to be recognition, rather than substance, shows their distance from Adorno and Marx.

of “totality.” Yet, as Albert – not quite unjustifiably – complains, although “the dialectical concept of totality . . . constantly recurs in theoreticians who follow in Hegel’s footsteps,” and although these thinkers “look upon this concept as being in some way fundamental,” they fail to provide a “precise formulation of this concept” (PD 167). Popper is even more trenchant than Albert, claiming that Adorno’s concept of totality is “completely trivial,” since it simply signifies that social totality consists of social relations that are interconnected, and this triviality has been presented by innumerable philosophers and sociologists (PD 297).

We should take Popper’s *triviality charge* seriously. In fact, there is always a danger in any holistic thought of becoming devoid of content. In response to the question why an individual fact is such and such, it is sometimes asserted merely that the individual fact cannot be explained on its own, and has to be explained through the whole, which makes the individual fact what it is. Yet when the question of the exact nature of this whole that is the ultimate explanans of all explananda is pressed, the answer is not clear. The whole, in this way, becomes a means for non-explanation, perhaps a rhetoric device to persuade, but not to determinately explain. In this section, my aim is to flesh out in detail what Adorno means by the concept of totality, and show that his conception is far from trivial.

The tradition of critical social theory makes ample use of philosophical and metaphysical concepts to make sense of the social and political world. True to the spirit of this tradition, Adorno identifies society with totality. However, according to Adorno, it is not the case that simply any human community throughout history constitutes a totality. Rather, it is only in capitalism that society, properly speaking, becomes a totality (GS 6: 313). The building block of this totality, the principle that permeates capitalism and connects all phenomena with each other, is the “exchange principle” [Tauschprinzip]. Adorno, following Marx, believes that capitalism is a social formation in which the commodities are primarily produced not for the sake of use by the producer, but to be exchanged with other commodities produced by other people. The principle of exchange thus makes human community in capitalism “a radically socialized society” (GS 5: 273), a society in which all social phenomena become so interrelated that they constitute a totality (GS 5: 275). That is, according to Adorno – and this point is not Marx’s – the principle of exchange in advanced capitalism not only forms the domain of what we ordinarily call the market or the realm of economy but transforms almost all aspects of life: from our intimate personal relationships in the case of romantic love, to how we

spend our leisure time, to the ostensibly more exalted areas of life including culture, art, and even the way we do philosophy (GS 6: 206).

According to Albert, using the concept of totality or society in sociology is useless and even misleading, since claims about totality or society as such are not empirically testable or verifiable (PD 175). We always encounter particular social phenomena, occurring in particular social contexts. Therefore, we would be better off limiting our investigation to the realm of the factual, since it is only through attention to the facts that we can test our theory and find out whether it works. Adorno's answer to this criticism shows how deeply his Hegelian commitments run, and how profoundly he diverges from Albert. According to Adorno, "while society cannot be abstracted from individual facts, nor be grasped as an individual fact itself, there is nonetheless *no* social fact which is not determined by society as a whole" (GS 8: 10). Thus Adorno is committed to two seemingly antithetical claims: one, societal totality is not something distinct from individual social phenomena; two, nevertheless, no individual social phenomenon can exist on its own, and nor can it be made intelligible without considering its relation to the totality. Adorno makes this point through an explicitly dialectical formulation:

Societal totality does not lead a life of its own over and above that which it unites and of which it, in its turn, is composed. It produces and reproduces itself through its individual moments.... This totality can no more be detached from life, from co-operation and the antagonism of its elements than an element can be understood merely as its function without insight into the whole which has its source in the motion of the individual himself. (PD 107)

That the totality is not separable from the individual moments shows that Adorno is reacting to certain neo-Platonic readings of Hegel. Adorno emphasizes that also for Hegel there is no "preformed" totality, but that totality is only constituted through its constituting moments and their interrelations. In good Hegelian fashion, Adorno maintains that society qua totality is not a *thing*, whether material or immaterial, and "cannot be ostensibly [deiktisch] shown" (GS 8: 11), but is essentially a "process." This means that through the interrelation of individuals, a dynamic totality is being formed, which nevertheless is effective, so to speak, in said individuals from the beginning. This point, of course, can never be empirically tested:

No experiment could convincingly demonstrate the dependence of each social phenomenon on the totality, for the whole which pre-forms the

tangible phenomena can never itself be reduced to particular experimental arrangements. Nevertheless, the dependence of that which can be socially observed upon the total structure is, in reality, more valid than any findings which can be irrefutably verified in the particular, and this dependence is anything but a mere figment of the imagination. (GS 8: 556, PD 113)

It is Hegel's logic that grasps the primacy of totality adequately. This is why Adorno thinks the proper method for doing sociology is not empiricist, but must be based on Hegel's logic. Indeed, in contrast to contemporary Critical Theory, Adorno believes that Hegel's penetrating vision about the modern social world is *only* achieved by virtue of his speculative logic, and "loses its substance" as soon as that logic is laid aside (GS 5: 252). Thus, for Adorno, the logic remains "indispensable" for social knowledge (PD 113).

The Hegelian heritage in Adorno's conception of society qua totality is evident in two other points that I would like to briefly address. Firstly, Adorno does not conceive the relation between the individual and society as the traditional relation of species and genus. It is not the case that if we begin with individuals, and classify them according to their similarities and dissimilarities, we could climb up the ladder of classification and eventually reach a highest category – society – under which all other lower classificatory categories could be subsumed (GS 8: 9). On this point, Adorno is exactly following Hegel, as Hegel's totality is not achieved through the process of inductive classification. Totality for Hegel is not a kind of Porphyrian tree that orders categories. Rather, Hegel's method of explaining totality is characteristically developmental. That is to say, Hegel shows how the categories, through their internal insufficiencies, must necessarily develop into more complex categories, until reaching the maximally complex category which is totality. Secondly, in Adorno's reading of Hegel, totality does not consist of moments that are simply in harmony with each other. Rather, "as a critic of romanticism, Hegel knows that the whole realizes itself . . . only through discontinuity [and] alienation" (GS 5: 253). Hegel's totality, according to Adorno, is not an "unruptured unity" (NS-V 2: 37), but a unity that is achieved through antagonistic relations obtaining between its constituents.<sup>8</sup>

There is one aspect of Adorno's conception of totality that needs specific attention. According to Adorno, totality is *coercive* upon the individuals, who nonetheless constitute it.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Adorno talks about society's "omnipotence" in capitalism, and "the powerlessness of the individuals, confronted

<sup>8</sup> See Adorno (NS-V 2: 66), and PhG §19.    <sup>9</sup> O'Connor (2013: 34ff).

by the totality" (PD 78). This point is a signpost in my interpretation of Hegel's logic of essence in this chapter and of Marx's analysis of capitalism in the next chapter. We saw that the constituting principle of totality for Adorno is the exchange of commodities. The best evidence that the totality is coercive upon individuals is that whoever does not adjust himself to this logic is doomed to be destroyed. "The total interrelation has a form that requires all to submit themselves to the law of exchange, if they don't wish to perish, irrespective of whether they are subjectively guided by the 'profit motive' or not" (GS 8: 14). According to Adorno, this is exactly the point that the positivist strands in sociology, through their empiricist methodology and their underlying nominalist metaphysics, are not able to grasp: namely, what is ultimately effective in capitalism is "the blindly dominating totality," not the individuals (PD 14). Indeed, following the Hegelian tradition of secularization of philosophical-theological concepts, Adorno designates society as the "ens realissimum," i.e., the most real being (GS 6: 309).

Adorno associates the power of totality over individuals with the notion of a "spell" [Bann] from which no one can escape, and which has replaced Greek fate in capitalism. The individuals are spellbound, as it were, because they follow the logic of the totality compulsively, even without being aware of it. The individuals might think that they are autonomous, but in truth "they behave on their own in accordance with what is inescapable" (GS 6: 337–38). The totality constitutes their very individuality, and because of its constitutive character, is not necessarily experienced by them as something alien. However, somebody who wants to oppose the power of the spell, Adorno asserts, will as it were automatically be "mutilated" into an "insignificant" thing, which "does not have any substance" (HF: 96).

According to Adorno, the spell of totality is effective upon all people without exception, and not merely upon workers or the unemployed. Even those who control the process of production remain "the appendages of their own machinery of production" and are thus required to follow the logic of exchange of commodities. The power of a particular employer over a particular employee is not due to his personal power, but is in truth the "epiphenomenon" of the power of totality (HF: 30). This is why the conflict between the two is not comprehensible on its own, but must be understood through analyzing the totality of society (GS 8: 10).

According to Adorno, although the principle of exchange is the main principle constituting the totality in capitalism, this does not mean that one can deductively derive all social spheres directly from it. The totality in capitalism, rather, has some "noncapitalist enclaves" that cannot be



immediately deduced from the exchange-principle. For example, one cannot explain the persistence of the institution of the family on the basis of the principle of exchange alone. And yet the particular form that the institution of the family takes in capitalism, i.e., the nuclear family, is shaped by economic relations based on the exchange principle. Thus, even those enclaves that purport to be independent from the totality of society are in fact dominated by it, and must be accordingly explained by analyzing their relation to the totality (PD 107).

The power of totality over individuals is not immediate and direct. Rather it always obtains through mediation of the power of determinate social institutions over individuals. The basic relation of determinate social institutions with individuals is not simply one of giving orientation, as the contemporary philosophers of recognition would believe, but one of "coercion" [Zwang]. According to Adorno, "the specifically social consists precisely in the predominance of institutions over men" (GS 8: 9). In capitalism, the individuals are reduced to "mere executive organs" of the institutions (GS 6: 336), that is, to their mere "disempowered products" (GS 8: 9).

Finally, I should make a brief note on Adorno's famous saying in *Minima Moralia* – "the whole is the untrue" (GS 4: 55) – and emphasize that it should not be considered as inconsistent with Hegel's "the true is the whole" (PhG §20). Rather, Adorno interprets the second claim in a *descriptive* or *structural* way. The truth is that the totality in capitalism is the most real being, and that the function of individuals is only to contribute to its existence. In contrast, the first claim has to be understood in an *evaluative* way. That individuals are only the "executive organs" of the totality makes the totality in capitalism, in an evaluative sense, untrue. That is to say, for Adorno, totality is a critical category that at the same time has an objective character. We will see in the rest of the chapter how the same holds for Hegel's substance in the logic of essence. But let us first review Hegel's criticism of our natural conception of totality.

### 3.2 Two Misconceptions of Totality

We might naturally think (1) that totality is the sum total of all realities, or (2) that the whole is composed of parts. In this section, I show that Hegel is critical of these two views.

(1) One natural way of conceiving of totality is to understand it in terms of allness, i.e., all realities cumulated together. Karl Popper in the *Poverty of*

*Historicism* ascribes this conception of the whole to the Hegelian-Marxian tradition, and criticizes it (Popper 2012 [1957]: 70ff).<sup>10</sup> According to Popper, the concept of the whole in this tradition is used to denote “the totality of all the properties or aspects of a thing, and especially of all the relations holding between its constituent parts” (Popper 2012 [1957]: 70). He continues,

If we wish to study a thing, we are bound to select certain aspects of it. It is not possible for us to observe or to describe a whole piece of the world, or a whole piece of nature; in fact, not even the smallest whole piece may be so described, since all description is necessarily selective. It may even be said that wholes in [this] sense . . . can never be the object of any activity, scientific or otherwise. If we take an organism and transport it to another place, then we deal with it as a physical body, neglecting many of its other aspects. If we kill it, then we have destroyed certain of its properties, but never all of them. In fact, we cannot possibly destroy the totality of its properties and of all the interrelations of its parts, even if we smash it or burn it. (Popper 2012 [1957]: 71)

According to Popper, studying totality in this sense is a “logical impossibility,” since any study must “abstract” from a vast array of details, and only take into account those aspects that are relevant to the study. Popper’s point about the impossibility of conceiving of totality in terms of allness is well taken. But Hegel (or Marx or Adorno, for that matter) never thought of the whole in this way. For Hegel, it is clear that the process of adding things or properties or relations one by one such that we eventually reach totality is an instance of “bad infinity” and leaves the totality simply indeterminate. Indeed, Hegel emphasizes that totality is not *omnitude realitatis*; it is not the “sum total of all realities” [Inbegriff aller Realitäten]; since this “lacks all determinate character, and is inherently lifeless and empty” [in sich tote, leere, Bestimmungslosigkeit] (WL II: 14, SL 390). This implies that for Hegel, contrary to what Popper would ascribe to him, true knowledge of a society does not involve knowing *everything* about that society – from its geography, to sexual relationships between people, to food preferences, to details of their way of talking and behaving, etc. – and Hegel himself, when he talks about different societies throughout history in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, never proceeds that way. (To be a good Hegelian historian, one does not need to talk about *all* the events in detail, but rather

<sup>10</sup> The part of the book that I am referring to is entitled “The Criticism of Holism.” In this part, Popper is actually criticizing Mannheim’s *Man and Society*, but from the context it is clear that he means his criticism to be applicable as much to Hegel and Marx as to Mannheim.

to show the “idea” within the historical facts, leaving those unrelated issues aside.)<sup>11</sup> In his *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel makes it clear that understanding everything is not the aim of philosophy:

Philosophy has to start from the Concept, and even if it does not assert much, we must be content with this. The Philosophy of Nature is in error when it wants to account for every phenomenon [allen Erscheinungen]. This is what happens in the finite sciences, which try to trace everything back to general conceptions, the hypotheses. In these sciences, the sole verification of the hypothesis lies in the empirical element and consequently everything must be explained. But what is known through the Concept is clear by itself and stands firm; and philosophy need not feel any embarrassment about this, even if all phenomena are not yet explained. (EN §270Z)

Indeed, Hegel's method of theorizing the totality is much more selective than Popper might consider appropriate in science. In the quoted passage, Hegel even asserts that understanding totality in terms of allness counts more as a desideratum for the empirical sciences than in speculative philosophy, because according to the empirical methodology the foundation of science is the empirical fact, and unless all relevant empirical facts are understood, we cannot be sure that the corresponding theory is true. In contrast, for speculative philosophy, which deals with the essential or conceptual structure, much of the empirical detail can be neglected. To give an example from Hegel, in order to understand what a species is, it is “indifferent” whether there are “sixty-seven species of parrots” or “a dozen more,” and such trivialities do not belong to the sphere of philosophy (WL II: 524, SL 804).

(2) Another, and related, natural way of understanding totality is to conceive of it as consisting of parts, such as a table that consists of four legs and a surface. This conception has also permeated our way of thinking about social wholes. We might think of a state as consisting of three parts – executive, legislative, and judicative – or of society as consisting of individuals. Hegel regards this way of conceiving of totality as inadequate, and devotes a section of the logic of essence – “the relation of the whole and the parts” [Das Verhältnis des Ganzen und der Teile] – to criticizing it. Hegel does not deny that there are some wholes that can be conceived as simply consisting of parts – mostly those wholes that have a “mechanical” nature – but he

<sup>11</sup> In his early essay “How the Ordinary Human Understanding Takes Philosophy – as Displayed in the Works of Mr. Krug” (1802), Hegel already makes this point. A certain Professor Wilhelm Traugott Krug demands idealist philosophy deduce “every dog and cat, and even Mr. Krug's writing pen.” Hegel points out that such a demand is simply ludicrous, and it is not the business of philosophy at all to attempt to deduce “the whole system of representations” (WW 2: 194).

believes that those wholes are “merely low-level” and thus “untrue.” The true whole – which has its model in organic life and the realm of the mental and the social – cannot be understood through the relation of parts and whole. Yet this, Hegel believes, is exactly the way that the ordinary, analytic way of thinking regards the whole. So, for example, in psychology it is usually assumed that the mind or the spirit has different faculties or powers – such as imagination, sensation, memory, understanding, etc. – and the mind is simply the coming-together of these parts (EL §135Z). The problem with this analytic way of thinking is that it does not grasp the parts in their internal unity, and thus regards parts and whole as “indifferent” towards each other. Indeed, the language that Hegel uses to describe the relation of whole and parts is highly reminiscent of the logic of being:

The *relationship of the whole and the parts* is the immediate relationship; hence, the thoughtless relationship and the turning over of the identity-with-itself into diversity. There is a passing-over from the whole to the parts and from the parts to the whole, and in the one [the whole or the parts] the opposition to the other is forgotten since each is taken as a self-standing existence, the one time the whole, the other time the parts. Or since the parts are supposed to subsist *in* the whole and the whole to consist *of* the parts, one time the one, the other time the other is the *subsisting* and the other is each time the *unessential*. The *mechanical* relationship, in its superficial form, consists generally in the fact that the parts are taken as self-subsisting against each other and against the whole. (EL §136)

According to Hegel, in the relation of whole and parts, each of the relata is considered at *one time* as self-subsisting and thus independent of the other, and at *another time* as related to the other. However, these two aspects never get further articulated, such that the relation between them remains an “immediate relationship” where the two aspects are simply externally cemented together, in Hegel’s words, with a mere “too” [auch].

Hegel substantiates his insight about the externality of the relation of parts and whole with two sets of arguments, one explicating how the relation of parts and whole is in fact tautological, and the other explaining how this relation yields an infinite regress. Let us first recap why Hegel thinks the relation of parts and whole is tautological. According to Hegel,

- (1) “Although the whole is equal to the parts, it is not equal to *them* as parts.”  
Rather,
- (2) The whole is equal to the parts as their being “*together*” [*zusammen*]. But

- (3) "This their 'together' is nothing else but their unity, the whole as such." Therefore,
- (4) "*The whole as whole* is equal not to the parts, but to *the whole*,"

and this is obviously a tautology. Hegel makes a similar argument, this time beginning with the parts:

- (1) Although the parts are equal to the whole, "they are not equal to it as [their] unity."
- (2) Rather, the parts are "equal to the *whole* as a manifold; that is to say, they are equal to it as a *divided whole*" [*geteiltem Ganzen*].
- (3) But the divided whole is simply the parts.
- (4) Therefore, "the *parts as parts* are equal, not to the *whole as such*, but in it to *themselves*, the *parts*,"

and this is obviously a tautology (WL II: 169, SL 516).

Regarding the second point, namely, that the relation of parts and whole yields an infinite regress, Hegel makes the following argument:

- (1) The whole is a composite, consisting of parts.
- (2) "The part insofar as it is a part, is not a whole; it is not a composite, hence it is a *simple*."
- (3) But the part is a part only through the relation of parts and whole. This means that
- (4) The part is not a part by and through itself.
- (5) In the relation of whole and parts, everything is either a part or a whole.
- (6) From (4) and (5): the part is a whole.
- (7) "But as a whole, it [the part] is again composite; it consists of parts."
- (8) And "so on to infinity" (WL II: 171, SL 517–18).

According to Hegel, if we conceive of the part independently of the whole, we must concede that the part is nothing but a whole, since the part can be a part only in its relation to the whole. That is to say, in the relation of the whole and parts, there is "a perennial alternation of the two determinations of relation, in each of which the other immediately arises," and this is in fact, according to Hegel, an articulation of an infinite regress (WL II: 172, SL 518).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, from a Hegelian point of view, even propositions of Gestalt psychology such as "the whole is more than the sum of its parts" are indeterminate, and already point towards a more determinate

<sup>12</sup> Hegel's argument here clearly echoes Kant's second antinomy (KdV A434, B462ff), which deals with the relation of parts and whole.

conception of totality; since if that which is more than the summation of parts is itself a part, the proposition contradicts itself, and if it is the whole itself, the proposition is simply tautological.

To conclude, the correct way of understanding the relation of individual and whole is not to conceive of individuals as parts of the whole, but rather as “moments” of the whole. The point, of course, is not merely verbal. In contrast to the part, the moment is already constituted by the whole and cannot be conceived as self-subsistent apart from the whole. The judiciary is not self-standing apart from the totality of the state, but is formed through the state. The individuals are not separable from society, but become what they are only through society. The relation of part/whole can best be understood in terms of spatial representations, such as a country on a map of the world. But the relation of member and whole does not have such spatial connotations and cannot be understood through pictorial thinking. Rather, the whole is like an invisible ground that constitutes individuals. Let us now turn, then, to the argument of the logic of essence which we left in the previous chapter, in order to understand how Hegel conceptualizes this invisible ground.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.3 Actuality

In the first part of the logic of essence, Hegel engages in a discussion of “reflection” and “opposition” in order to argue for an ontology that is absolutely relational. The very idea of absolute relationality commits him to develop the concept of totality, since the fact that all individuals are relationally constituted already implies that there is a closed system of relationality that unites the individuals. Hegel initially calls such a system of relationality a “*world*” [Welt], more precisely “a world of reciprocal dependency” (EL §123), which he then explicitly identifies with “totality” [Totalität] (EL §132). Hegel’s task in the rest of the logic of essence – in the second part, “essence” and “appearance,” and in the third part, “actuality” – is to further determine the concept of totality.

We can also observe the necessity of totality from the social point of view. It is obvious that the relation of opposition between two individuals,

<sup>13</sup> In his *The Metaphysics of the Social World*, David Ruben (1985) argues that individuals are not “parts” of social wholes, but their “members” (Chapter 2). According to Ruben, the relation of “being a part of” is transitive, while the relation of “being a member of” is intransitive, and this means that the two sorts of relation have to be different from each other: “If a is an s-part of b, and if b is an s-part of c, then it follows that a is an s-part of c. The membership relation is intransitive, because I might be a member of a trades union, and the trades union might be a member of the Trades Union Congress, but it might be that no individual can be a member of the TUC” (69).

say between a capitalist and a worker, is not sustainable by itself. If the asymmetrical interdependence of a capitalist and a worker was all there is to their relation, the worker could easily change his situation – say, through exiting the said relation. He cannot do so – or, more precisely, even if he exits that particular relation, he will then need to submit to yet another capitalist – because such a relation of opposition is grounded in an extensive set of economic, social, legal, and political institutions that stabilize it. From a Hegelian perspective, the interrelation of such institutions constitutes a totality, a “system of ethical world” that in its very totality exerts power over all individuals. This exactly corresponds to Hegel’s conception of “substance” in the logic, which he identifies with “absolute power.”<sup>14</sup>

Substance, for Hegel, is the most determinate form of actuality, and thus we first need to review Hegel’s argument in the text that leads towards the derivation of the concept of substance. We may recall from Chapter 1 that Hegel denies the traditional distinction between the essential and the unessential. Hegel argues that if we accept the Aristotelian distinction between essential and unessential properties, or the Lockean one between primary and secondary qualities, we end up in an indeterminate situation, since we cannot determinately know which properties are essential or primary, and which ones are unessential or secondary. That is to say, such a conception of the essential *in exclusion* of the unessential inevitably leads to a conceptual block, indicating that this question – what is essential, what is unessential? – is the wrong one to ask. Rather, Hegel asserts that essence must be conceived as *a totality, which in its very totality appears in the totality of appearance*. According to Hegel, essence and appearance are thus “*two worlds, two totalities* of the content, one of which is determined as *reflected into itself*, the other as *reflected into another*” (WL II: 186, SL 529):

The world of appearance and the essential world are each in themselves the totality of self-identical reflection and reflection-into-an-other, or of being-in-and-for-self and appearance. Both are self-subsistent wholes of existence: the one is supposed to be only reflected existence, the other immediate existence; but each *continues* itself in its other and is therefore in its own self the identity of these two moments. What is present, therefore, is this totality which repels itself from itself into two totalities, one the *reflected*, the other the *immediate* totality. Both, in the first instance, are self-subsistents, but

<sup>14</sup> We must note that even if we grant that the foundation of the modern world is the symmetrical relation of intersubjectivity, as the philosophers of recognition do, one still needs to give an account of the totality which constitutes such relations. Thus, the logical primacy will always be on totality, although the philosophers of recognition might want to repress it in their theories.

they are self-subsistent only as totalities, and they are this in so far as each essentially contains within it the moment of the other. (WL II: 162, SL 510)

Thus, according to Hegel, the initial totality that emerges from absolute relationality, the “world of reciprocal dependency,” must be conceived in the second step as a totality that repels itself into two totalities of essence and appearance that codetermine each other: the one totality, essence, makes the inner, “reflected existence,” while the other totality, appearance, is the outer, observable, that is to say, “immediate existence.”<sup>15</sup> To illustrate this point, consider that if we want to understand a phenomenon (say, mass unemployment in capitalism) in an adequate way, from a Hegelian point of view we have to “bifurcate” it and understand it at one time in terms of an *appearance* of an essence (that a significant number of people do not have jobs, with all material, psychological, and social ailments that come with this), and at another time in terms of an appearance of an *essence* (the inner logic of capital which produces an “industrial reserve army,” or deregulation of labor markets by the state, etc.).

Hegel’s dialectical conception of the relation of essence and appearance is meant to refute two fallacies, which can be called the fallacy of “emanatistic idealism” and the fallacy of pure phenomenism. According to the former, which is also occasionally misattributed to Hegel himself,<sup>16</sup> essence is a separate, hidden kernel, so to speak, that may emanate into an appearance. Hegel criticizes this view, because of its unacceptable theological implications, and further because this view instigates a *chorismos* or dualism between essence and appearance that cannot be bridged. In contrast to this view, for Hegel “essence must *appear*” (EL §131), which means that “essence is thus not *behind* or *beyond* appearance,” but is present *in* appearance: “what is internal is also present externally,” Hegel emphasizes (EL §139).

According to pure phenomenism, which can also be dubbed “positivism,” only the observable phenomena exist, and there is no interiority or essence to be further investigated. Hegel considers this view to be fallacious, since it disregards the inner, i.e., the essential dispositions that may not be immediately observable in the phenomena, but nonetheless are effective in the phenomena. Consider that the economy in capitalism has

<sup>15</sup> It is worth mentioning that the relation of essence and appearance is oppositional, in that each obtains only by virtue of its other, and yet the relation between the two is asymmetrical. Indeed, opposition remains central until the end of the logic of essence, as the relation of substance and accidents is also oppositional. It is only in the logic of the Concept that the relation of opposition will be superseded, explication of which lies beyond the scope of this book.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Emil Lask (2002 [1902]: 44ff), who coins the term “emanatistic idealism.”



an inner, essential disposition to develop into crises. However, this does not mean that *at any given time* crises obtain in capitalism. Rather, it means that *over a sufficiently long period of time*, the inner disposition of capitalism necessarily produces crises that are observable. It is obviously wrong to reduce the permanent inner disposition of capitalism to produce crises to their actual periodic outbreak. Rather, one must posit that the inner disposition has always been present until the point that it eventually appears in a crisis.

Hegel holds that essence “translates itself” [sich selbst übersetzt] into appearance. His usage of the language of “translation” to describe the relation of essence and appearance is significant, and implies that, firstly, “essence” and “appearance” are expressed in two distinct languages. The language of essence is the language of interiority, of laws and forces that are not visible, but which must be inferred from the language of appearance that is directly observable. Since these two languages are distinct from each other, there must be, secondly, a mediation procedure which relates the one to the other. And since through this procedure, i.e., the procedure of translation, some mistranslations or inadequacies are bound to occur, thirdly, there is inevitably always a mismatch between essence and appearance.<sup>17</sup>

Hegel attributes the mistakes that occur in the procedure of translation of essence into appearance to a particular type of contingency, which I will discuss in Chapter 5. For now, we must observe how Hegel derives the category of “actuality” [Wirklichkeit] through the inadequacy of the relation of essence and appearance. Indeed, this derivation has already been accomplished, since actuality is nothing but the unity of essence and appearance, the unity that obtains through the process of mediation between the two. In Hegel's florid language,

Actuality is the *unity of essence and existence*; in it, *shapeless* essence and *unstable* appearance – or subsistence without determination and manifoldness without permanence have their truth. (WL II: 186, SL 529)

“Actuality” is the title of the third and last major section of the logic of essence, and it is where Hegel discusses the adequate conception of totality. In accordance with the ontology of absolute relationality, for Hegel, totality qua actuality is not a thing, but a relation or a process that mediates between essence and appearance. More precisely, for Hegel, actuality is the

<sup>17</sup> This is the way in which Höle expounds on the implications of Hegel's usage of the concept of translation in the context of the relation of logic to Realphilosophie (Höle 1998: 84).

overarching unity consisting of the two moments of essence and appearance, the overarching unity that is achieved solely through the relation of essence and appearance. As essence and appearance are both moments of one and the same actuality, we must conclude that in translating essence into appearance, actuality in fact translates itself and thus obtains a *self-referential* character. Hegel insists that, in contrast to the totality of essence that appears in a yet relatively distinct totality of appearance, actuality “manifests itself; that is, in its externality it is *its own self* and is *itself* in that alone, namely only as a self-distinguishing and self-determining movement” (WL II: 201, SL 542).

According to Adorno, Hegel’s philosophy is aimed at overcoming what Adorno calls “perspectivist philosophy” [Standpunktphilosophie]. By this, Adorno means a kind of philosophy that, rather than allowing the phenomena to speak for themselves, looks at the phenomena from an external point of view. Within the framework of the logic, actuality is where such an external perspective is fully overcome. The relation of essence and appearance still presupposes an external standpoint on the phenomena, an external standpoint from which the distinction between essence and appearance can be made.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, Hegel insists that the exposition of actuality cannot obtain by external reflection; rather the true exposition of actuality is in fact actuality’s “*own* exposition [of itself], and only *a displaying of what it is*” (WL II: 187, SL 531). Hegel considers actuality to be the “light” inherent in the phenomenon that shines through it. Thus, for Hegel, as Hoffmann writes, “to grasp something in its actuality is to see it in the light of its self-relation, rather than throwing light on it from outside” (Hoffmann 2012: 353).

We can better understand Hegel’s conception of totality as actuality when we compare it with Aristotle’s and Spinoza’s conceptions. Hegel considers his own view to be close to Aristotle on two points. First, he credits Aristotle with rightly subverting Plato’s dualism of the intelligible form in the beyond and its sensible instantiation. According to Hegel, the Platonic conception of the form reduces it to a mere “potentiality” [dynamis], a mere capacity that may not be actualized. By contrast, Aristotle conceives of the form as actuality [energeia], in Hegel’s words “as the inner that is outright out there” *in* the phenomenon (EL §142Z). This does not mean that actuality for Aristotle is *merely* what is present – that would be the fallacy of pure phenomenism – rather it means that actuality is the principle that is effective in the phenomenon and gives structure to it. This

<sup>18</sup> Taylor (1975: 282).

brings us to the second point of similarity between Hegel and Aristotle. For both, actuality is “the form that has activity” [Formtätigkeit]; “the form that moves itself” [Sichbewegen der Form]. Actuality, that is to say, is that which “activates what really matters” [Betätigung der Sache] in the phenomenon (EL §147).

The paradigmatic example of actuality for Hegel is a living organism. A living organism is a totality that is active, namely, a totality that actively regenerates and maintains itself. The organism does not have some non-realizable, occult essence; rather, the inner disposition of the organism to self-maintenance in every single moment is translated in the way that the organism interacts with the environment. That is, the organism cannot achieve its integrity once and for all. It must rather constantly recreate it. Although Hegel does not yet explicitly describe actuality in terms of power – he does so in describing the most determinate form of actuality, i.e., substance – we can realize that for Hegel actuality is already power. The organism has the *power* to maintain and sustain itself. More specifically, the organism has the *power* to affirmatively respond to certain stimuli, namely, to those stimuli that are conducive to its well-being. And it has the *power* to negatively respond to certain other stimuli, to those stimuli that are harmful to it.<sup>19</sup>

That the paradigm of actuality for Hegel is a living organism shows how his conception of totality differs from Spinoza's totality. I will discuss Hegel's criticism of Spinoza's substance below, but it is appropriate first to indicate two points of difference. While for Spinoza, the totality is, as it were, an all-encompassing metaphysical cake that categorically does not allow any otherness, Hegel is not a monist in that strong sense. Rather, the totality for Hegel is like an organism that lives in an environment that is distinct from, and thus functions as, the other to it. However, for Hegel, although the organism is dependent on its other, that dependency does not function as a sheer constraint for it. Rather, the organism has a productive relationship with its other, a relation that allows the organism to maintain its identity. Secondly, in contrast to Spinoza's substance, which is once and for all equal to itself, Hegel's actuality is necessarily a dynamic category. According to Hegel, actuality is not an “unmoved identity” (WL II: 197, SL 538). Rather, for Hegel, actuality is an identity that is achieved through its constant regeneration. That is to say, actuality for Hegel has a *sui generis* character.

<sup>19</sup> Marcuse (1975: 104).

We must note that the *sui generis* character of actuality for Hegel brings him close to Spinoza's *causa sui*, and indeed Hegel's own conception of actuality ("the unity of essence and existence") clearly echoes Spinoza's definition of *causa sui* ("that whose essence involves existence" (Erd1)). Hegel considers Spinoza's *causa sui* to be a "totally speculative concept," and criticizes Spinoza for his failure to conceptually relate *causa sui* to substance, asserting "if Spinoza had further developed what lies in *causa sui*, then his substance would not be the rigid" (WW 20: 168). After this initial characterization of the relation of Hegel's actuality to Spinoza, let us now turn to Hegel's criticism of Spinoza's substance in more detail, as it paves the way for us to understand Hegel's own conception of substance.

### 3.4 The Critique of Spinoza's Substance

The near-extravagant praise that Hegel bestows on Spinoza is hard to miss: in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* he claims that "to be a follower of Spinoza is the essential commencement of all philosophy." And even more floridly, Hegel says, "when man begins to philosophize, the soul must commence by bathing in this ether of one substance" (WW 20: 165, LHP III: 257). It is easy to recognize Hegel's own debt to Spinoza in the logic of essence. Similarly to Spinoza, who gives absolute ontological priority to the totality of substance, Hegel considers the totality of substance to be the most determinate category in the logic of essence, one which retrospectively grounds all the other categories.<sup>20</sup> However, Hegel's high praise of Spinoza should not blind us to their essential difference. Hegel's "proper refutation" of Spinoza obtains in the beginning of the logic of the Concept, where Hegel proves that substance must equally be conceived as subject, but the seed of such refutation is already planted in the logic of essence in his discussion of substance.

Hegel praises Spinoza for giving priority to substance, but criticizes him in that for Spinoza "everything is merely submerged and perishes in substance," and therefore that "absolute substance is not understood as the point of departure for *differences, particularization, individuation*" (WW 4: 434). That is to say, according to Hegel, the main problem with Spinoza's metaphysics is the insufficient, meager conception of

<sup>20</sup> Precisely speaking, in the logic of essence substance develops into the "relation of causality," which ultimately culminates in "reciprocal action" [Wechselwirkung]. Reciprocal action is clearly a Fichtean category, through which Hegel makes the transition to the logic of the Concept. Thus, we can assert that for Hegel reciprocal action "stands on the threshold of the Concept" (EL §155Z), and does not belong to essence proper.

individuals, which drives Hegel to designate Spinoza's philosophy as "acosmism." Contrary to some recent literature, by attributing acosmism to Spinoza, Hegel does not mean that Spinoza is an Eleatic monist, for whom individuals do not exist.<sup>21</sup> Rather, Spinoza is an acosmist according to Hegel because in Spinoza's metaphysics the principle of individuality "does not attain the legitimacy befitting it" [nicht zu seinem Rechte gelangt] (EL §151Z). Hegel invokes a host of trenchant words to discuss how Spinoza conceives of individuals: individuals for Spinoza, he says, are "transient," "atrophied," and "vestigial," and are "consumed" and "devoured" by substance.<sup>22</sup>

We must note that in Hegel's own logic of essence, there is only a weak conception of individuality, and as we may recall from the quotations at the beginning of this chapter, Hegel himself describes individuals as "disappearing" in substance. Indeed, a main drive of the transition from the logic of essence to the logic of the Concept in Hegel's logic is the lack of a proper conception of individuality in essence. As my aim in this book is to show that the logic of essence provides the underlying ontology of capitalism, I do not discuss that transition here. However, I should mention that even within the logic of essence Hegel's conception of individuality differs from Spinoza. That is to say, although both for Hegel's logic of essence and for Spinoza individuals are transient, their manner of transience is distinct. This shows itself primarily in the way that Hegel thinks Spinoza misconstrues the relation of totality and individuals.

Spinoza conceives of individuals as affections of substance, i.e., as modes. According to Hegel, the movement from substance to modes, i.e., from totality to individuals in Spinoza, can be characterized as a movement of "condescendence" [herabsteigen, heruntersteigen]. The movement is condescendence, Hegel maintains, since once the unity of substance passes over into a multiplicity of modes, there is "no return" from the multiplicity of modes to the unity of substance. Such movement well accords with the "oriental conception of emanation," in which

the absolute is the light which illumines itself. Only it not only illumines itself but also *emanates*. Its emanations are *distancing* from its undimmed clarity; the successive productions are less perfect than the preceding ones from which they arise. The process of emanation is taken only as

<sup>21</sup> See Melamed (2010).

<sup>22</sup> Hegel even allows himself to make a disgraceful pun that in the same way that in Spinoza's philosophy, the individuals "disappear" [verschwinden] and are "consumed," Spinoza himself died of "consumption" [Schwindsucht] (WW 20: 185).

a *happening*, the becoming only as a progressive loss. Thus being increasingly obscures itself and night, the negative, is the final term of the series, which does not first return into the primal light. (WL II: 198, SL 538–39)

That the movement from substance to modes does not return to substance means that for Spinoza substance *constitutes* modes, but is *not constituted* by modes. That is, for Spinoza, mode “is completely reduced to a mere posited being” (WL II: 195 SL 536). We can best understand this claim through paying attention to Spinoza’s definitions at the beginning of the book.<sup>23</sup> According to Spinoza, substance is “that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself” (E1d3). And mode is “that which is in something else, through which it is also conceived” (E1d5). That is, for Spinoza substance is *solely* defined in terms of internal determination, and mode is *solely* defined in terms of external determination. (In Hegel’s words, substance is purely “in sich,” while mode is purely “in etwas Anderes.”) Now, according to Hegel, it is unclear how modes can be *internal* to substance (since every determination is internal to substance), yet at the same time *external* to substance (since the definition of mode is that of pure externality). That is, once there is a gulf between a completely internal determination of substance and a completely external determination of mode, it is not clear how this gulf can be overcome. For this reason, the relation of substance and mode, according to Hegel, remains under-determinate in Spinoza, and can even be characterized as one of “external reflection.”

This argument, I believe, should not necessarily be read as effective against Spinoza, but rather as a point through which Hegel can elaborate his own dialectical method. Hegel thinks that the correct way to conceive of the relation of substance and mode is to conceive of it, contrary to Spinoza, as constituting a reflection-logical relationship. That is to say, substance is not only internally determined, but is also externally determined by modes. Similarly, modes are not only externally determined by substance, but are also internally determined. This implies that modes must have the quality of “reflection-into-self” [Reflexion-in-sich] through which they reflect the totality of substance into themselves. This is a principle that is, of course, absent in Spinoza’s philosophy, but can be complemented by a principle of another philosopher of the same historical period, the monad of Leibniz (WL II: 198, SL 539). If modes attain the

<sup>23</sup> It is worth mentioning that Hegel’s critique of Spinoza for the most part is based on his reading of definitions on the first page of the *Ethics*, neglecting the rest of the book.

quality of reflection-into-self, they become self-referential, and self-referentiality is indeed the determination of individuality.<sup>24</sup>

Because Spinoza defines substance in terms of pure internal determination, substance remains for him, according to Hegel, an "abstract determination" and a "motionless identity." If substance stops at this stage, Hegel asserts, no "development," no "activity," no "Spirituality" would result. For this reason, Spinoza's philosophy is that of "petrified" and "fixed" [starr] substantiality (WW 20: 166). In contrast to Spinoza's definition of substance, Hegel offers his own conception of substance, which is a *movement*, from itself to modes, and *simultaneously*, from modes to itself. (Substance is therefore "die zurückkehrende und aus sich selbst anfangende Bewegung" (WL II: 195).) As Hegel's substance is this movement itself – and not a movement upon an unmoved thing – substance is "not that which is *equal with itself*, but that which *generates itself as equal*" (WL II: 194, SL 535). For Hegel, substance is not the "negation" of modes. It is instead the "negation of negation," that is, the negation of modes that are already constituted by substance (WW 20: 164). This obviously makes substance contradictory: although substance is necessarily constituted by modes, nevertheless it retains its independence against modes.

That Hegel conceptualizes substance in terms of movement shows how distant he is from the traditional conception of substance. The concept of substance was introduced in western metaphysics to explain the subsistence of a self-same entity underneath change. With this conception of substance, a duality or *chorismos* was fixed between the substance, which was posited as inert, and change, which was superimposed upon substance. Hegel, in overcoming the duality of change and self-sameness, integrates change within the definition of substance. Substance is that which generates and regenerates itself as identical with itself *through* the movement of change.<sup>25</sup> As we will see later in more detail, this movement is the absolute power, which, through positing individuals and superseding them in the movement, is able to maintain its dynamical self-sameness.

It is wrong to think that Hegel's refutation of Spinoza in the logic is purely metaphysical. And indeed, as recent scholarship has demonstrated,

<sup>24</sup> "While Spinoza asserted the universality, the oneness of substance merely, . . . Leibniz, by means of his fundamental principle of individuality, brings out the essentiality of the opposite aspect of Spinoza's philosophy, being for self, the monad, but the monad regarded not as absolute notion, not yet as the I. The opposed principles, which were forced asunder, find their completion in each other, since Leibniz's principle of individuation completed Spinoza's system as far as outward aspect goes" (WW 20: 233, LHP III: 325). Also see WL II: 198, SL 539.

<sup>25</sup> Lukács (GLW 14: 83).

Hegel's arguments against Spinoza, from a purely metaphysical point of view, are at times not convincing.<sup>26</sup> Rather, Hegel's logic, I would suggest, is a historically specific ontology, which lays bare the fundamental structure of (social) reality in the modern world. According to Hegel, Spinoza's philosophy is an ontology appropriate to the premodern oriental world, where individuals are only regarded as "merely transitory," without any constitutive role in the formation of the totality of society. In the modern world, where "the western principle of individuality" has come to fruition, one needs another account of substance (i.e., Hegel's own) to capture this totality (EL §151Z, my emphasis). In his discussion of Indian religion in particular and oriental religions in general, Hegel tells his students that

to characterize the East briefly, the Spirit does arise there, but the situation is that the subject, the individuality, is not a person but has the character of being submerged in the objective. There the relation of substantiality is the dominating. . . . The situation of the individual, the particular, is that of being only something negative in face of the substance. The highest achievement of such an individual is eternal blessedness which is only absorption in this substance, an extinction of consciousness, and so the annihilation of the subject and therefore of the difference between substance and subject. The highest state, therefore, is unconsciousness. In so far as individuals have not attained this blessedness but still exist on the earthly level, they are excluded from this unity of substance and individual; their situation and character is one without spirit and without substance, and, in relation to political freedom, they have no rights [sie sind Substanzlose und – in Beziehung auf politische Freiheit – Rechtlose]. In this event their will is not a substantial will but one determined by caprice and natural contingency (e.g. by caste) – a being without inner consciousness.<sup>27</sup>

This is an interesting passage in which Hegel blends ontology, religion, and politics together. For our current purposes I put religion aside. According to Hegel, in the premodern world the individual does not have any rights, and for that reason is directly subsumed by the totality.<sup>28</sup> The mode of domination, therefore, is immediate. The relation between the state and the individual is a one-way relationship, in which the totality of the state does not "return back" to the individuals. Because the individual does not have any self-subsistence or self-determination properly

<sup>26</sup> See especially Macherey (2011), Melamed (2010), and Sandkaulen (2007).

<sup>27</sup> Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, Hamburg: Meiner, p. 227, 1940; *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. T. M. Knox and A. V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 167, 1987.

<sup>28</sup> See also *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Rechts*, Nachschrift Wannenmann 1817/18, GW 26.1: §90, p. 100.



understood, his position in society is merely the result of "natural contingency," not the result of his own decisions and deeds. We can ignore for now Hegel's philosophical optimism, according to which in the modern capitalist world, the individuals are in fact self-determining. (From a logical point of view, this occurs in the transition from essence to the Concept. For now we are still in the realm of essence.) Hegel's own analysis of substance has shown that substance in the modern world has to be understood as constituted by individuals, but nevertheless as having an independent status against them. The modern totality is also coercive upon individuals, but in contrast to the pre-modern world, the mode of coercion here is mediated. In modern liberal capitalist society, the individuals do indeed have political and legal rights: they can vote, for example, or they are equal before the law. They do indeed enjoy a certain degree of (formal) freedom. The mode of domination of totality over individuals is not despite this formal equality, formal freedom, and individuality, but through them. The relationship of totality and individuals is not one of pre-modern one-way domination, but a two-way relationship, in which although individuals constitute the totality, they nevertheless are thoroughly coerced by the totality. Of course, there can be no talk of substantive freedom of self-determination of individuals here. Although individuals might think that their achievement or failure is the result of their own freedom, as I will discuss in Chapter 5, this freedom is only due to contingency. However, in contrast to the premodern form of contingency, which purported to have the quality of "naturalness" (as in the Indian caste system), the modern form of contingency is primarily social, and is "posited" by the totality of society as contingency.

### 3.5 Substance as Absolute Power

Throughout his account of the logic of essence, Hegel has been preparing the ground for his final discussion of the category of substance. He has argued that totality is not to be understood as the sum-total of all realities, and that totality does not simply consist of parts. Rather, totality must be conceived, in the first step, as the essence that translates itself into another totality of appearance. And in the second step, he has argued that totality is the constant process of mediation that obtains between essence and appearance, the constant process that generates the unity of essence and appearance. Hegel calls this constant process of mediation actuality; and finally, in the last part of the logic of essence, he argues that substance must be conceived in light of such a conception of actuality.

In Aristotle's *Categories*, substance is conceived as a bare substratum that underlies accidents. The conception of substance as a substratum has persisted in the history of philosophy in one way or another through the Middle Ages up to modern philosophy as exemplified by Descartes, Locke, and Spinoza. Yet Hegel radically undermines the traditional ontology by arguing that substance must be conceived relationally. He emphasizes that substance is not a "thing," rather it is "being plainly [schlechthin] as reflection" (WL II: 217, SL 554). For Hegel, substance is in fact "the *relation* of substantiality" [das *Verhältnis* der Substantialität] (my emphasis), the reflective relation that obtains between the totality of substance and the totality of accidents, the reflective relation through which substance and accidents become united.

Thus, for Hegel there is no sharp distinction between substance and accidents. It is worth noting that on this point Hegel in fact follows Kant. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes that an accident is "simply the way in which the existence of a substance is determined." That is to say, accidents for Kant are not separable from substance, but they "are nothing but special ways in which it [i.e., substance] exists" (B229 A186). Kant initially and for analytic purposes distinguishes between the "alteration" [Veränderung] that happens to substance, from the "change" [Wechseln] that happens to accidents, but then maintains that the two are in fact coextensive: it is only by the change of accidents that substance alters. In other words, for Kant substance is the relatively enduring, which, while maintaining its identity, undergoes an alteration by virtue of the change of accidents.

It is in this particularly Kantian spirit that Hegel defines substance as "the appearing totality" *in* accidents, and holds that substance "is the totality of the whole and encompasses accidentality within it, and accidentality is the whole substance itself" (WL II: 220, SL 556). The main feature of substance for Hegel is its "actuality" [Actuosität]. By actuality, Hegel means the incessant "movement of accidents" through which substance's "tranquil coming forth," i.e., its relative permanence, is attained (WL II: 220, SL 556). The paradigmatic instances of substance for Hegel are organic totalities, namely living nature and human societies. An organic totality is relatively permanent, and that relative permanence is obtained only through the constant change of its accidents.

In Aristotle's conception of substance in the *Categories*, substance is conceived as the object of predication, but is itself not predicable. This implies that for Aristotle accidents depend on substance, but substance is independent of accidents. By contrast, for Hegel, the relation of

dependency is always two-way: accidents evidently depend on substance, but substance is also dependent on and constituted by accidents. Nevertheless, although substance is constituted by accidents, it contradictorily retains its independent status. In a typically dialectical manner, Hegel asserts that substance "is the beginning from itself which first is the positing of this self from which the beginning is made" (WL II: 220, SL 556). Substance is contradictory, since it is the beginning point of the process of its constitution, but a beginning which *already* presupposes the movement of accidents. It is worth noting that the contradictory status of Hegel's substance puts him at odds with Spinoza. According to Spinoza, substance cannot contain contradiction, since contradiction is contrary to conatus and leads to the self-destruction of substance (E3p5). By contrast, for Hegel the contradiction of substance is the source of its very identity and vitality.

Hegel makes profuse use of the concept of power to describe the structure of substance, and asserts outright that substance is "absolute power" [absolute Macht] (WL II: 220, SL 556). For clarification, we may distinguish two kinds of power of substance: the power of substance to sustain and reproduce itself, *and* the power of substance over accidents. The two are in fact two aspects of the same process, since it is only through exercising power over accidents that substance is able to maintain itself. To put it differently, accidentality is already substantiality, and thus the power of substance over accidents is in fact the power of substance over itself.

The power of substance over accidents has two aspects: (1) The power of substance is *constitutive* of accidents. According to Hegel, substance is "the being in *all* being" (WL II: 219, SL 555). That is to say, the power of substance inheres in all accidents and constitutes them as what they are.<sup>29</sup> (2) The power of substance over accidents is *causal*. We may recall that for Hegel something is actual insofar as it is effective. Thus, even in actuality the reference to causality is already present. Now, Hegel explicitly states that "it is as cause that substance has actuality" (WL II: 224, SL 559). According to Hegel, substance exerts a rich array of causal powers over accidents:

Substance manifests itself through actuality with its content into which it translates the possible, as *creative* [*schaffende*] power, and through the possibility to which it reduces the actual, as *destructive* [*zerstörende*] power. But the two are identical, the creation is destructive and the destruction is

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Spinoza's substance: "Whatever exists in God, and nothing can exist or be conceived without God" (E1p15).

creative; for the negative and the positive, possibility and actuality, are absolutely united in substantial necessity. (WL II: 220, SL 556)

Substance both creates and destroys the accidents. From the standpoint of totality of substance, any destruction of accidents is at the same time re-creation of substance, and any re-creation of substance is accompanied by destruction of accidents. To illustrate, consider that the substantiality of a tree obtains by virtue of the tree maintaining itself through creating and destroying the individual leaves.

According to Hegel, the power of substance over accidents is not direct. Substance is not a “thing” that directly causes accidents to be or to cease to be. Rather, as substance is the process of relationality that obtains between accidents, the power of substance over accident is always *mediated* by the interaction of accidents with each other. Hegel emphasizes that substance is “as *power* the *mediating*” (WL II: 221, SL 557), and writes that

The accidents as such . . . have *no power* over one another. . . . Insofar as such an accidental seems [scheint] to exercise power over another, it is the power of substance which embraces both within itself; as negativity it posits an unequal value [einen ungleichen Wert setzt] determining the one as a ceasing-to-be and the other with a different content as a coming-to-be, or the former as passing over into its possibility, the latter into actuality – ever sundering itself into the differences of form and content, and ever purging itself of this one-sidedness, yet in this very purging it has fallen back into determination and bifurcation. One accident, then, expels another only because its own *subsisting* is this totality of form and content itself in which it and its other equally perish. (WL II: 221, SL 556–57)

Note that Hegel uses the language of illusion [Schein] to describe the power of accidents over one another. As we may recall from Chapter 1, illusion has a specific ontological status for Hegel. It initially purports to be independent of essence, but on further analysis it becomes clear how it is in fact posited or generated by essence. Accidents purport to exercise power over one another, but in fact it is the power of substance that works through them; posits “an equal value” between them; and makes one more powerful than the other. With respect to the absolute power of substance, the two accidents are equally powerless, which results in their ultimate perishing in substance.

In order to understand how the power of substance over accidents is mediated with the power of accidents over each other, we have to look at the dialectical development of the category of “causality” for Hegel. Importantly, causality for Hegel does not have the ontological or

explanatory primacy that it does in the mechanical sciences.<sup>30</sup> Causality in the mechanical sciences presupposes an atomistic ontology, where things that have causal power over each other are conceived to be primarily independent of each other. (The paradigmatic example of such mechanical causality is Hume's: the billiard balls that hit each other.) By contrast, Hegel derives causality *from* substantiality, which implies that for Hegel causality is always already embedded in the totality of substance. Indeed, the first form of causality that Hegel develops out of the relation of substantiality – the “formal causality” – is nothing but the causality of substance over itself. As both cause and effect are substance conceived at one time as that which determines, and at another time as that which is determined, Hegel concludes, “consequently, effect contains nothing whatever that cause does not contain. Conversely, cause contains nothing which is not in its effect” (WL II: 224, SL 559, emphasis omitted).

The formal causality of substance over itself is, however, mediated by the second form of causality that Hegel calls the “real” or the “finite” causality, which is in fact the causality of accidents over each other. As what is a cause is already an effect of something else *ad infinitum*, finite causality, Hegel reminds us, leads to an infinite regress. The infinite regress of cause and effect is the mark of the “impotence” [Ohnmacht] of accidents to “attain” and “hold fast” to a “unity” (WL II: 231, SL 565) – such a unity must be bestowed on accidents by substance.

This brings us to the third and final form of causality, which is the unity of the first two. The real causality now occurs in a systematic fashion, which makes the chain of causality self-enclosed. Hegel calls the third form of causality “action and reaction” [Wirkung und Gegenwirkung], which occur between “active” and “passive” substance and together constitute a “*substantial identity*” (WL II: 233, SL 566).<sup>31</sup> We can conceive the passive substance as the milieu of externality, where there is a *horizontal* relation of causality between accidents that in fact do not have power over each other. However, the passive substance is at the same time determined by the active substance, which exerts power over it. That is, the *horizontal* relation of causality (of passive substance) is at the same time determined by the *vertical* relation of causality (of active substance over passive substance).

<sup>30</sup> I will discuss this point in more detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>31</sup> It is worthwhile emphasizing that in ordinary thought we tend to use the categories of action and reaction for individuals that are self-subsistent and independent from each other, like two countries that act and react upon each other. Here Hegel's usage is different, as action and reaction obtains between substance conceived one time as active, and the same substance conceived as passive (WL II: 233, SL 566).

Hegel talks about “action” and “reaction” of active substance and passive substance over each other, since active substance is not a petrified “thing” which determines the passive substance in a one-way manner, but is sensitive to the reaction of passive substance on it, although in the end it is the active substance that makes substance what it is. We can make sense of this dynamic conception of causality of substance – the interdependence of passive and active substance, yet ultimately under the terms that active substance eventually sets – in organic life. The parts of the organism are in a horizontal relation of causality with each other (it is the heart that pumps the blood), but such a horizontal relation occurs only in the framework of a vertical relation of the causality of the totality of the organism over all the parts (over both the heart and the blood).<sup>32</sup>

The *vertical* relation of causality of the totality of substance over accidents is not visible. This invisible relation of power, however, becomes manifest when accidents transgress the boundaries of possible behavior that substance sets for them. The manifestation of power in this way is “violence” [Gewalt] which is able to coercively restore the normal status of substance as a self-maintaining totality. “Violence is the *manifestation of power*, or *power as external*,” Hegel writes. The phenomenon of violence shows that the vertical relation of causality of substance over accidents is capable of overriding the horizontal relation of causality of accidents with each other. Such overriding, however, always occurs *through* the horizontal causality of accidents over one another. And finally Hegel emphasizes that, when there is such a transgression on the part of an accident, violence is not a mere possibility, but will necessarily be done to the accident, and this only proves again that the accident cannot purport to be self-subsistent, but remains an accident *of* substance (WL II: 235, SL 567).<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Although Hegel does not refer to Spinoza in his explication of causality, it is plausible to see the development of the category of causality in Hegel’s logic as a critical, dialectical reconstruction of Spinoza’s conception of “immanent cause” to “transitive cause,” which are ultimately united in the relation between “active nature” (*natura naturans*) and “passive nature” (*natura naturata*) (see EIp18 and EIp29s). For a helpful discussion of Spinoza’s conception of immanent cause and how it relates to transitive cause (without referring to Hegel), see Melamed (2013: 61–66).

<sup>33</sup> The transition from “action and reaction” to the final category of the logic of essence, “reciprocal action” [Wechselwirkung] is the transition that abolishes the relation of power constitutive of essence, and instigates the transition to the logic of the Concept. Whereas in “action and reaction,” it is the active substance that ultimately determines the passive substance, in “reciprocal action,” “each is at the same time active and passive substance in relation to the other; [and] any distinction between the two has been sublated” (WL II: 238, SL 569). Explicating this transition (and how it translates into social philosophy) is beyond the scope of this book.

### 3.6 The "Spell" of Totality

According to John Searle, for anything to be called power, it has to fulfill two constraints: (1) it must be clear who is the agent and who is the patient of power (the "exactness constraint"), and (2) it must be volitional or intentional (the "intentionality constraint").<sup>34</sup> Searle's conception of power is the theoretical articulation of the liberal, juridical conception of power, and comparing Hegel with him shows just how remote Hegel is from such a tradition.

In Hegel's conception in the logic of essence, power satisfies neither criterion. The most fundamental form of power for Hegel is substance, i.e., totality or social structure, which cannot be empirically or "exactly" located. Secondly, the power of totality is not volitional or intentional. Totality for Hegel is a mechanism that generates and regenerates itself, without any freedom – the latter being the essential element of any intentionality. It is true that the substance or the social structure is responsive to external stimuli, but again such responsiveness is as it were automatic, without any intentional choice being involved.<sup>35</sup>

According to Hegel, the nonintentional and impersonal power of totality can be grasped by the concept of "fate" [Schicksal], which lies at the heart of ancient Greek religion. In contrast to Christianity, the gods of ancient Greece are not, properly speaking, personal. They are rather "mere personifications that as such do not *know themselves*, but are only *known*." Not only individuals, but also the gods are subjugated to an alien fate, which is itself imagined as "the undisclosed [unenthüllte] necessity and thus as utterly impersonal, devoid of self, and blind" (EL §147Z).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Searle (2010: 151–52). Thus, according to Searle, "if someone smells so bad that whenever he enters a room, everyone gets up and leaves, his entering the room smelling bad is not an exercise of power," since it is not intentional (Searle 2010: 148). Like Searle, both Berlin (2002 [1969]: 169) and Pettit (1997: 52–53) regard coercion or power as being necessarily intentional.

<sup>35</sup> Hegel discusses intentionality and freedom in the logic of the Concept; the logic of essence remains the logic of blind necessity. Corresponding to the distinction of essence and the Concept, one must distinguish social domination and political power for Hegel. While the former is non-intentional and impersonal, the latter is clearly both intentional and personal. Hegel's conception of the political is complicated, and discussing it is beyond the scope of this book. See especially PR §279, where Hegel develops the concept of political sovereignty. Here Hegel identifies "sovereignty" with full-blown subjectivity, which is both personal and endowed with will. For Hegel, political power is to be exercised ultimately by "*one* individual," which he identifies roughly with the "monarch."

<sup>36</sup> Cf. also Hegel's early *Systementwürfe* III, where he compares the Greek religion with the absolute religion of Christianity. The Greek religion, Hegel writes, is "die mythische, ein Spiel, das des Wesens nicht würdig, ohne Gründlichkeit und Tiefe ist, wo das Tiefe das unbekannte Schicksal ist. Die absolute Religion aber ist das Tiefe, das zu Tage herausgetreten – die Tiefe ist das Ich – es ist der Begriff, die absolute reine Macht" (GW 8.281).

Similarly, in the *Science of Logic* Hegel uses the concept of “fate” to describe the mechanical relation between the individual living being and its species:

Power, as *objective universality* and as violence directed *against* the object, is what is called fate – a conception that falls within mechanism in so far as it is called *blind*. . . . The fate of the living being is in general the *species*, which manifests itself through the fleetingness of the living individuals, which in their *actual individuality* do not possess the species as species. (WL II: 421, SL 720)

According to Hegel, the individual is “external” to itself, since it exists primarily for the sake of the species of which it is an individual. What ultimately matters is the species, and the life and death of the individual is essentially a contribution to the perpetuation of the existence of the species. The individual is only an accident of the totality of the species, and as such is dispensable. Although the species endures over time, its endurance is not the result of any intentionality. That is to say, the species does not intentionally decide which individual must come to be and which must cease: i.e., the necessity involved here is blind.

In the case of human beings, for Hegel the relation of the individual to the totality of the species is not simply a natural or biological relation, yet if the structure of totality of society is in accord with the one that obtains in the logic of essence, the mechanical process of fate holds nonetheless. It is true that the individual can reflectively separate itself from the logic of totality, and correspondingly act against it, “but by this very separation, it excites against itself the mechanical relationship of a fate,” which inevitably leads to its ruin. Indeed, in a society of the logic of essence, the supposedly insurgent individual “lacks the *capacity* for *what is imparted* [to it by the totality] and therefore is disrupted by it, because it [the individual] cannot constitute itself as *subject* in this universal [i.e., totality], or make this latter its *predicate*” (WL II: 420–21, SL 720). By the reference to the Greek tragedies, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel develops the dialectic of individual and fate (PhG §463ff), and conceives of the action of the individual *against* fate as a “crime,” which immediately and mechanically brings about her proper punishment by fate. Hegel emphasizes that in such tragic situations the actions of the individual against the constitutive mores of society cannot change them, since “the ethical, as the absolute *essence* and at the same time the absolute *power*, cannot suffer any inversion of its content” (PhG §466).<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Although the Hegelian view is different from Durkheim’s – the former is dialectical, the latter is not – it is worth quoting a passage from Durkheim that captures the coercive character of society in



To use a concept from Lukács, under the spell of totality individuals have a “concretely possible space for action” [konkret möglicher Handlungsspielraum] within which they are free to act as they please (GLW 14: 236); but the contours of such a space are determined by the necessity of the totality of society. Again referring to the Greek conception of fate and nemesis, Hegel maintains that individuals are allowed to enjoy a certain degree of “everything human: wealth, honor, power, and likewise joy, pain, etc.”; but if this measure is overstepped it leads directly to their ruin (EL §107Z). Since the normalization of insurgents is necessary for the self-maintenance of the totality, the totality of fate acts violently against them: “what is presumptuous, what makes itself too great, too high is reduced to the other extreme of being brought to nothing, so that the mean of measure and mediocrity is restored” (WL I: 390, SL 329).

Obviously, Hegel thinks that the concept of fate belongs to the ancient world, and that modernity is a *disenchanted* world in which fate does not play any important role (EL §147Z). The dissolution of the concept of fate in the modern world for Hegel is closely tied up with the development of individuality. The individual in modernity has the right to be recognized by the social order as an individual, and should be able to reciprocally find his reconciliation and consolation in the latter. It is exactly for this reason that in the official locus of Hegel's social and political philosophy, the *Philosophy of Right*, the concept of fate does not have any significant role. However, despite Hegel, and as Marx's doctrine of the fetishism of commodities has shown us, although capitalist modernity is *disenchanted* in respect to gods and religious thinking, it is at the same time *re-enchanted* by the power of the economic sphere that exists independently of individuals and acts coercively upon them.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, Marx explicitly calls the power of capital a “fate” [Verhängnis] that exerts an alien power over individuals. And for the same reason, Adorno calls the totality of society, which for him

a way that is close to Hegel: “I am not obliged to speak French with my fellow-countrymen nor to use the legal currency, but I cannot possibly do otherwise. If I tried to escape this necessity, my attempt would fail miserably. As an industrialist I am free to apply the technical methods of former centuries, but by doing so I should invite certain ruin. Even when I free myself from these rules and violate them successfully, I am always compelled to struggle with them. When finally overcome, they make their constraining power felt by the resistance they offer” (Durkheim 1964: 3, quoted by Bhaskar 1998: 43).

<sup>38</sup> In the third volume of *Capital*, Marx explicitly calls the reification of economic and social relations in capitalism “the religion of everyday life” (MEW 25: 838, C III: 969).

is primarily formed through the principle of exchange, a “spell” [Bann] that nobody can escape from.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, the difference between fate in the ancient world and in capitalism must be noted. Whereas in the ancient world, fate is simply *given* irrespective of individuals, in capitalism the economic fate is solely produced by the interaction of individuals, although in the end it exists independently of them. It is for this reason that Hegel’s ontology of substance in the *Science of Logic*, in which individuals and substance are in a reflection-logical relation with each other, precisely captures the specificity of the power of the economy in capitalism.

The reflection-logical relation of individuals and substance drives us to reconsider Hegel’s conception of power in relation to the two criteria of power posited by Searle. We saw that the power of totality over individuals is never immediate, but is *always* mediated by the action of individuals. Therefore, although for Hegel the power of the totality is non-intentional and impersonal, this power has always to be mediated by the intentional and personal power of individuals. Thus, we can say that, in this latter sense, Searle’s intentionality and exactness constraints are both satisfied. Similarly, as we will see in the next chapter, although capital exerts a non-intentional and anonymous power over individuals, the power of capital must always be mediated by the action of the living capitalists who are endowed with consciousness and will. In capitalism individuals are, to use Adorno’s phrase, “functionaries” of the social position that they occupy, and yet there must always be individuals who occupy that social position for which they remain only functionaries.

<sup>39</sup> We must also note that the omnipotence of fate constituted by the exchange principle does not imply that the power of the totality is only restrictive. Recall that for Hegel the power of substance is both “destructive” and “creative.” Similarly, the power of the totality of society is both restrictive and enabling for individuals. It is restrictive, since in capitalism any activity that does not result in saleable products, such as the care work that typically women do at home, tends to be entirely or severely devalued. But the power of totality can at times be productive: consider that the traditional hierarchical values in paternalistic societies can potentially – but not necessarily – be diminished or abolished through the impersonal relations of exchange.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Capital as Totality*

It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality. The category of totality, the all-pervasive domination of the whole over the parts is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel and brilliantly transformed into the foundations of a wholly new science. [...] Proletarian science is revolutionary not just by virtue of its revolutionary content which it opposes to bourgeois society, but above all because of its method. *The primacy of the category of totality is the bearer of the principle of revolution in science.* (Lukács GLW 2: 27, original emphasis)

[In capitalism, capital] is a general illumination, which bathes all the other colors and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it. (Marx MEW 42: 40, G 107)

#### **4.1 The Critique of Methodological Individualism**

The main task of Jon Elster's magisterial *Making Sense of Marx* (1985) is to develop and defend the thesis that Marx was a methodological individualist. By methodological individualism, Elster means

the doctrine that *all* social phenomena – their structure and their change – are in principle explicable in ways that *only* involve individuals – their properties, their goals, their beliefs and their actions. (Elster 1985: 5, emphasis added)

Elster regards methodological individualism as a form of reductionism. In the same way that in biology explanation at the level of organisms and cells must be replaced by explanation at the level of molecules, Elster asserts, in the social sciences explanation at the level of social structures and wholes must be replaced with explanation at the level of individuals. Thus,

according to Elster, explanation in the social sciences should follow a three-tiered procedure:

First, there is a causal explanation of mental states, such as desires and beliefs.... Next, there is intentional explanation of individual action in terms of the underlying beliefs and desires.... Finally, there is causal explanation of aggregate phenomena in terms of the individual actions that go into them. (Elster 1985: 4)

According to Elster, scientific explanation is primarily explanation in terms of cause and effect. By going from macro to micro, that is, from the aggregate phenomenon to its constituents, we can approach the ideal of providing a continuous chain of cause and effect. In doing so, Elster holds, we can effectively avoid spurious explanations, namely, those explanations that invoke merely apparent causes instead of real causes (Elster 1985: 4). One prominent mode of spurious explanation is holistic explanation that substitutes causal explanations with a vague reference to totality. Thus, against holism Elster emphasizes,

To explain is to provide a *mechanism*, to open up the black box and show the nuts and bolts, the cogs and wheels, the desires and beliefs that generate the aggregate outcome. (Elster 1985: 5)

Given that Elster considers methodological individualism to be the correct scientific method, it is to be expected that he should attack the Hegelian origins of Marx's theory. Indeed, he regards Hegel's dialectical logic, which has an undeniably holistic character, to be merely a "source of confusion" (Elster 1985: 43). Correspondingly, he regards those parts of Marx inspired by Hegel's dialectic to be "near-nonsense" (Elster 1985: 4). That is to say, Elster effectively takes Marx to be using two quite distinct methods: a holist method that is inspired by Hegel, and an individualist method inspired by Marx's genuinely scientific interests.<sup>1</sup> While the former must be discarded, Elster holds, the latter should be further explicated and developed.

If Elster is correct that Marx employed two completely antithetical methodologies even in the same work, we should conclude that Marx had a schizophrenic mind: yet I do not think this is an interpretive approach that we should adopt. While it is true that Marx occasionally explains, say, the behavior of total capital in terms of the aggregate actions

<sup>1</sup> It is worth mentioning that individualism here does not have any (explicitly) ethical or evaluative connotations: it does not mean egoism. "Methodological individualism is a doctrine about how social phenomena are to be explained, not about how they should be evaluated" (Elster 1985: 8). See also Popper (1983).

of individual capitalists – and Elster is admirably good at explaining those parts of Marx's theory – this does not mean, even in those parts, that Marx uses an individualistic methodology. Rather, such individualistic arguments are located within Marx's overall holistic framework, and therefore presuppose holism. As we will see, for Marx the laws and regularities of capital exist independently of individuals, but they are *activated* through individuals. Marx's *dialectical* conception of individuals and social structure – a conception according to which the social structure is solely constituted through the action of individuals, yet at the same time has a life of its own – allows ample room for individualistic explanations. However, as important as Marx's individualistic explanations are, they always have a subordinate significance to the holism that frames his entire argument.<sup>2</sup> On this point, Marx is greatly influenced by Hegel, and it is appropriate to re-examine Hegel in this context.<sup>3</sup>

For Hegel, Elster's two methodological principles, i.e., individualism and the primacy of causal explanations, are adequate only for explaining mechanical wholes. The characteristic feature of mechanical wholes, such as a watch, is that its constituents are self-standing by themselves. The various parts of a watch, say, can be produced in various places, and then assembled to make the watch in yet another place. As the parts of a mechanical whole are self-subsistent, the relation of causality that obtains between them is also mechanical; that is to say, cause and effect in mechanical wholes are distinct from each other, such as a wheel that moves another wheel in the watch.

However, for Hegel, mechanical wholes are not true wholes. The true wholes for Hegel are organic wholes, which include living organisms and human societies. In contrast to mechanical wholes, organic wholes are *self-organizing*, *self-maintaining*, and *self-reproducing*. The constituents of organic wholes are so interwoven that they cannot exist independently of one another. (A heart and a lung cannot exist independently from each other, unless they are dead.) Within the framework of organic wholes, thus, the cause and the effect are not really distinct from each other, but are *moments* of the whole, which in fact causes *itself*. As we saw in detail in the previous chapter, Hegel considers such a true whole, which has a sui generis character, as "substance." (Note that it is not by accident that

<sup>2</sup> For helpful criticisms of reading Marx in terms of methodological individualism, see Mandel (1989) and Bensaïd (2009).

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of causality in Hegel's logic, and Chapter 5 for a more elaborate discussion of the relation of causality and necessity in Hegel.

Elster's example, namely the black box with its cogs and wheels, is an example of a mechanical whole, which he then applies to human society.)

Hegel calls mechanical causality "finite" or "real" causality. The defect of finite causality, according to Hegel, is that the chain of cause and effect leads to an infinite regress, and thus mechanical causality is not able to produce a *self-organizing, self-maintaining* whole. Mechanical causality, therefore, has to occur within a "substance," that is to say, within a framework that structures it. In Hegel's words, it is the effective "power" of substance that organizes mechanical causality into a unity – mechanical causality, on its own, is "impotent" to produce the desired unity. In the same way that Hegel considers mechanical causality to be finite, he regards substance as the infinite cause. And in the same way that for Hegel the finite and the infinite are not separable from each other and the infinite is nothing but the process which bestows unity on the finite, substance for Hegel is not a spiritual entity lying beyond or behind the chain of cause and effect; rather, substance is the very structure that organizes the chain of cause and effect into a living organism. Thus, for Hegel, substance is constituted through two moments: (1) the horizontal causality of the finite over each other, (2) the vertical causality of substance, i.e., infinite cause, over the horizontal causality. Each individual is determined horizontally by another finite cause, yet at the same time it is determined by the vertical causality of the infinite cause that gives the individual the specific place that it has in the chain of horizontal causality.

Hegel's conception of mechanical causality – according to which mechanical causality between individuals is not self-sufficient, and therefore has to be subordinated to the structure of the whole – underpins Marx's analysis of capitalism. It is not my intention here to discuss Marx's conception of causality in any detail.<sup>4</sup> What I want to do is to illustrate Marx's conception of causality through one prominent example, namely his analysis of competition.

Classical political economy is based on an anthropological conception that regards human beings as primarily defined by the pursuit of self-interest. In this conception, the principal mode of interaction between individuals is competition. Competition is conceived as *the* organizing principle of the economic order, which consequently makes the science of political economy possible. In the words of John Stuart Mill,

<sup>4</sup> For a helpful discussion, see Zelený (1980: 71–88).

Only through the principle of competition has political economy any pretension to the character of a science. So far as rents, profits, wages, prices, are determined by competition, laws may be assigned for them. Assume competition to be their exclusive regulator, and principles of broad generality and scientific precision may be laid down, according to which they will be regulated.<sup>5</sup>

It is through competition that Adam Smith explains the law of supply and demand, and it is equally through competition that David Ricardo explains how the rate of profit of various capitals becomes equal across society.<sup>6</sup> However, although competition plays such a pivotal role in classical political economy, it is never theoretically explained. Rather, competition is simply presupposed as a brute fact about human nature, which therefore does not require any explanation in economy. “Free competition,” Marx thus writes,

has never *yet been* developed by the economists, no matter how much they prattle about it, and [no matter] how much it is the basis of the entirety of bourgeois production, production resting on capital. (MEW 42: 327, G 414)

Marx does not deny the role of competition in capitalism. Indeed, as for classical political economy, for Marx competition is a necessary requirement for the sphere of economy to be lawful. Indeed, the entirety of *Capital* is written with the assumption of perfect competition in the market. What Marx denies, however, is the primacy of competition in (the explanation of) capitalism – and this makes his project not simply a continuation of the tradition of political economy, but a *critique* of political economy. In the context of his exposition of the concept of relative surplus value – the surplus value that a certain capitalist makes through increasing the productivity of labor relative to other capitalists – Marx remarks that,

While it is not our intention here to consider the way in which the immanent laws of capitalist production manifest themselves in the external movement of the individual capitals, assert themselves as the coercive laws of competition, and therefore enter into the consciousness of the individual capitalist as the motives which drive him forward, this much is clear: a scientific analysis of competition is possible only if we can grasp the inner nature of capital, just as the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies

<sup>5</sup> Mill (2004: Book II, Chapter 4, section 2).

<sup>6</sup> For a helpful discussion of the conception of competition in classical political economy, see Jessop (2010).

are intelligible only to someone who is acquainted with their actual motions, which are not perceptible to the senses. (MEW 23: 335, C I: 433)

This passage is noteworthy, since it clearly lays out the order of explanation for Marx. *First*, the totality of capital (“the inner nature of capital”) must be explained, and it is only *then* that is possible to explain the phenomenon of competition between individual capitalists.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, and in exactly the opposite direction to what Elster ascribes to him, for Marx, it is *because* the totality of economy is defined by capital that individuals become psychologically competitive; which is to say that competitive psychology is not a brute or “natural” fact of human-nature, but obtains in and through capitalism.

Marx frequently uses the term “illusion” [Schein] to refer to competition.<sup>8</sup> The self-sufficiency and freedom of individuals in competition is an illusion, properly speaking, since such freedom functions only as a moment of the totality of capital. The free competition between individuals, therefore, solely contributes to the subjugation of individuals under the rule of capital. “The domination of capital is the presupposition of free competition, just as the despotism of the Roman Caesars was the presupposition of the free Roman ‘private law’” (MEW 42: 551, G 651); therefore “it is not individuals who are set free by competition; it is rather capital, which is set free” (MEW 42: 550, G 650).

Although competition is an illusion, namely an illusion that originates from the surface appearance of capitalism, it is at the same time necessary and constitutive of capitalism. In what, then, does the necessity of competition in capitalism consist? In classical political economy, competition is conceived as the *cause* of regularities in capitalism, as the cause of, say, the law of supply and demand, or as the cause of the law of equalization of profit. Marx does not deny the causal significance of competition; yet he, like Hegel, transforms the *mechanical* causality of competition into the *substantial* causality of capital over itself, that is, the substantial causality that integrates the said mechanical causality in itself as its own moment. Thus in the *Grundrisse* he writes that

Competition generally, this essential locomotive force of the bourgeois economy, does not establish its laws, but is rather their executor.

<sup>7</sup> Also consider this passage: “*Conceptually*, competition is nothing other than the inner *nature of capital*, its essential character, appearing in and realized as the reciprocal interaction of many capitals with one another, the inner necessity as external necessity. (Capital exists and can only exist as many capitals, and its self-determination therefore appears as their reciprocal interaction with one another.)” (MEW 42: 327, G 414)

<sup>8</sup> The title of Chapter 50 of *Capital: Volume III* is “The Illusion of Competition.”



Unlimited competition is therefore not the presupposition for the truth of economic laws, but rather the consequence – the form of appearance in which their necessity realizes itself. . . . Competition, therefore, does not *explain* these laws; rather it lets them be *seen*, but does not produce them. (MEW 42: 457, G 552)

This is a complex passage, which indicates Marx's debt to Hegel's conception of causality. We must note, firstly, that competition for Marx on its own is not explanatory; it is rather the laws and regularities of capital which explain competition.<sup>9</sup> Yet, at the same time, secondly, the laws and regularities of capital necessarily require competition, since it is only through competition that those laws and regularities can be *activated*. In Marx's words, competition is the "consequence" [Folge] of capital, and yet at the same time, competition is the "essential locomotive force" [wesentliche Lokomotor] of capital. To refer to Hegel, we must grasp that the *horizontal* causality of individuals over each other in competition is not explanatory on its own: it becomes explanatory only when it is integrated into, and functions as a moment of, the *vertical* causality of the totality of capital over individuals. Marx frequently refers to the vertical causality of totality of capital over individuals as "the coercive laws of competition," namely, the laws that coerce individuals, on pain of perishing, to compete with each other.

For Hegel the "finite" or "real" causality – i.e., the horizontal causality – is what can be seen on the surface of the phenomenon, and the "infinite" causality – i.e., the vertical causality – is the "ideal" side that organizes the real side. The ideal side is not visible, and can only be grasped through conceptual analysis. Similarly, for Marx, the causality of competition is that which appears to the agents in capitalism, but the inner nature of capital, through which competition can be grasped, can be explained only through scientific analysis.

Further details of Marx's theory of competition are not important in the current context. What is important is the radical shift that Marx implements in methodology. Whereas classical (and neoclassical) political economy begins from individuals and analyzes the aggregate pattern of the behavior of individuals, for Marx the whole always has ontological and explanatory primacy. To put it in Hegel's language, whereas classical political economy is based on the logic of being, Marx's method is based on the logic of essence. A main task of the logic of essence is to show that

<sup>9</sup> Also: "Competition merely *expresses* as real, posits as an external necessity, that which lies within the nature of capital. Competition is nothing more than the way in which the many capitals force the inherent determinants of capital upon one another and upon themselves" (MEW 42: 551, G 651).

the self-subsistence of individuals is an illusion. Similarly, Marx's critique of political economy consists in showing that individualism, upon which classical political economy is grounded, is an illusion. By distorting Marx's method, I believe, Elster effectively ignores the specific nature of Marx's *critique* of political economy, thereby rejecting Marx's revolution in political economy.

If Marx's method is holistic, as I have argued, how then does Marx explain the whole? In mechanical sciences, the usual method of scientific explanation is analytic/synthetic. First, a totality is disaggregated into its constitutive parts. The parts are then studied independently of each other, and independently of the whole (analysis). Thereafter, the totality is re-aggregated from its constitutive parts to show how the parts interact with each other within the totality (synthesis). This method is appropriate for understanding mechanical wholes, in which the parts are – independently of the whole – self-subsistent. But it is not adequate for explaining the true wholes. One cannot dismember an organism, and still wish to study the organism in its totality, namely, when it is alive. Similarly, one cannot pluck out individuals from the social totality to examine their behavior in isolation, and then add up the individuals to construct the totality, since individuals are *already* constituted through society. Marx's solution to explaining the true wholes is, then, radically different from the analytic/synthetic method that is used in the mechanical sciences. His method, to use a term from Zelený, is "structural-genetic." Marx's method is structural since it analyzes the totality or the structure in which individuals stand, rather than analyzing the behavior of individuals. Marx's method is genetic, since it does not attempt to grasp the totality in one single stroke – it is not intellectual intuition – but rather it conceptually develops the totality from its less concrete to its more concrete determinations. In the mechanical sciences, the phase of analysis is distinct from and precedes the phase of synthesis. By contrast, Marx's structural-genetic analysis is *at the same time* analytic *and* synthetic. Marx's method is analytic, since the analysis makes manifest what is already implicitly contained in the concept of totality. His method at the same time is synthetic, since his exposition does not merely repeat the same data about totality – it is not tautological – rather, it explains the totality in an increasingly determinate way.<sup>10</sup> Marx's methodological debt to Hegel is obvious.<sup>11</sup> But Hegel's influence on Marx

<sup>10</sup> See Zelený (1980: 111–12).

<sup>11</sup> At the end of the logic, Hegel discusses his methodology, and writes that "this progression [of the concept of totality] is just as much *analytic* (in that the immanent dialectic only posits what is

is more profound than just a general influence on his methodological conception. Indeed, both the way and the order in which Marx explicates the totality of capital greatly resemble the development of totality in the logic of essence. Let us now see how.

## 4.2 Capital as the Dialectical Unity of Circulation and Production

### 4.2.1 *Exchange and Circulation*

In the logic of essence, we saw that Hegel develops an ontology that is absolutely relational. In this ontology, objects are not self-standing on their own, but are primarily defined in relation to each other. That is, for Hegel, objects are what they are in and through a system of total mediation that obtains between them. Hegel's ontology of absolute relationality accords with the social structure of capitalism. For Marx, what makes capitalism a system of absolute relationality is the relation of "exchange" between the products of labor. Marx regards the relation of exchange as "objective mediation" [gegenständliche Vermittlung] (MEW 42: 105, G 172), by which he means a kind of mediation that does not occur through thinking, but is a tangible social process.

However, what makes capitalism, in contrast to previous societies, a system of absolute relationality is not the mere presence of exchange, but its universalization. In those precapitalist societies where there was some sort of exchange of commodities, exchange remained a marginal phenomenon. The products were produced primarily for individual consumption, and only the excess or the surplus would get exchanged. By contrast, in capitalism, where the relation of exchange has become universal, the products of labor are produced *primarily* for exchange, and consumption always occurs by mediation of exchange. To put it differently, in precapitalist societies, the products of labor are not defined relationally (that is, in relation to other products of labor). They become relational only *ex post facto*, only if they get exchanged. By contrast, in capitalism, where a system of absolute relationality is formed, commodities are *ex ante* relationally defined; they become what they are only through relation with other commodities. According to Marx, the universalization of relations of exchange in capitalism implies

contained in the immediate concept) as *synthetic* (since in this concept this difference was not yet posited)" (EL §239).

(1) that my product is a product only insofar as it is for others; hence sublated individuality, universality (2) that it is a product for me only insofar as it has been alienated, become for others; (3) that it is for the other only insofar as he himself alienates his product, which already implies (4) that production is not an end in itself for me, but a means. (MEW 42: 127, G 196)

When the relations of exchange are universalized, the alienation of my product is simultaneously accompanied by the alienation of the other's product. That is to say, in a system of universal exchange any commodity is originally defined not in terms of its own (it is not *für es*), but in terms of its *relation* to others (it is *für andere*). In the same way that for Hegel relations precede individuals, for Marx, "appropriation through and by means of divestiture and alienation is the fundamental pre-condition" of the formation of commodities in capitalism (MEW 42: 126, G 196).

Marx clearly distinguishes "circulation" [Zirkulation] from "exchange" [Austausch]. The universalization of exchange forms a closed system or totality. In the construction of this totality, all commodities participate, which means that no commodity remains outside it.

To get circulation, two things are required above all: Firstly, the precondition that commodities are prices; Secondly, not isolated acts of exchange, but a *circle* of exchange, a *totality* of the same, in constant flux, proceeding more or less over the *entire* surface of society; a *system* of acts of exchange. (MEW 42: 119, G 188, my emphases)

There was exchange of products of labor and services in pre-capitalist societies (in the form of, say, "barter," "feudal services" etc.), but exchange per se does not produce circulation. It is only when exchange becomes ubiquitous that *all* commodities become strictly interrelated and produce the sphere of circulation. The universalization of relations of exchange, for its part, can only occur through the formation of a single commodity, i.e., money, that serves as the *universal equivalent* to all commodities, such that the value of each new commodity that is produced gets determined through its relation to the universal equivalent. (It is for this reason that Marx in the above passage asserts that the precondition of circulation is that all commodities be prices. Price in this context is "the expression of the value of a commodity in . . . money-commodity" (MEW 23: 110, C I: 189).) In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx writes

The continuing processes of the interrelations of commodities [die prozessierenden Beziehungen der Waren aufeinander] crystallize into distinct determinations of the universal equivalent, and thus the exchange process becomes at the same time the process of formation of money. This process as

a whole, which comprises several processes, constitutes *circulation*. (MEW 13: 37, MECW 29: 292)

The analogy of the sphere of circulation as a totality to Hegel's "substance" seems evident. (We will learn later that the totality of capitalist mode of production is crucially *more* than the sphere of circulation, but for now, let us hold on to circulation.) I would now like to emphasize three main points of similarity: (1) For Hegel substance as totality inheres in all individual entities and constitutes them. For Marx, commodities are values only insofar as they are "crystals of the common substance" (MEW 23: 52, C I: 128). This common substance is human-labor, but only insofar as it is mediated by and defined through the sphere of circulation.<sup>12</sup> The value of a commodity for Marx is not determined by the time of its individual production, but by virtue of the "socially necessary labor time" for its production. This means that the value of a commodity for Marx is determined not in isolation, but only in relation to the totality of the sphere of circulation. (2) For Hegel, substance is not an inert thing, but sustains itself through its constant renewal and reproduction. For Marx, the sphere of circulation is not a pre-given inert totality, but is "a process, a fluid whole of purchases and sales" (MEW 42: 126, G 196). That is, for Marx the dynamism of circulation is the prerequisite of its very identity. (3) For Hegel, substance obtains by the interaction of individuals; nonetheless, it paradoxically retains its independent existence. For Marx, it is the interaction of commodities that produces the sphere of circulation, and yet the rules governing circulation are independent of individual commodities.

#### 4.2.2 *The Priority of Production*

Granted that Marx begins with the sphere of circulation, it is nonetheless altogether wrong to concentrate on circulation to the exclusion of the sphere of production. Indeed, Marx asserts that circulation is only the "first totality [erste Totalität] among economic categories" (MEW 42: 127, G 197). Reconstructing Marx solely with a focus on the sphere of circulation would bring him too close to the current mainstream economic paradigm with its deification of the market.<sup>13</sup> We need, therefore, to re-

<sup>12</sup> Note that, for Marx, the human labor that is value-constituting is "abstract labor." Abstract labor is that aspect of labor that retroactively obtains through the process of circulation of commodities. The determination of abstract labor in *Capital* is a bone of contention in scholarship on Marx. I am following Michael Heinrich on this issue; see Heinrich (1994, 1999: 208ff).

<sup>13</sup> This brings us to a decisive point of difference between Marx and Adorno. Whereas for Marx, as we shall see, the dominating element in economy is clearly the sphere of production, Adorno appears to

examine Marx's conception of the totality, and see how he develops the totality of capital out of the totality of circulation.

In the Introduction to the *Grundrisse* – a text that has been rightfully dubbed “Marx's Discourse on Method”<sup>14</sup> – Marx analytically separates four major spheres within the economy: production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. According to Marx, “production creates the objects which correspond to the given needs; distribution divides them up according to social laws; exchange further parcels out the already divided shares in accord with individual needs; and finally in consumption the product steps outside this social movement and becomes a direct object and servant of individual need, and satisfies it in being consumed” (MEW 42: 24, G 89). Marx then undertakes an exposition of these spheres to demonstrate that they are all tightly interconnected, and to show how each reacts upon others and determines them. At the end of the analysis, he asserts

The conclusion we reach is not that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they all form the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity. Production predominates not only over itself, in the oppositional definition of production, but over the other moments as well [Die Produktion greift über, sowohl über sich in der gegensätzlichen Bestimmung der Produktion als über die andren Momente] . . . . A definite production thus determines a definite consumption, distribution and exchange as well as definite relations between these different moments. (MEW 42: 34, G 99, emphasis omitted)

According to Marx, production, distribution, exchange, and consumption are “moments” of an “organic whole” and “mutual interaction” takes place between them. This means that distribution, exchange, and consumption all have an effect on production and determine it. Yet, despite the close interconnection of all of the four moments, it is *ultimately* the sphere of production that is the “dominating” factor [das Übergreifende], and determines the economy as a whole.

The language that Marx uses is unambiguous, and leaves no doubt about the primacy of production for him.<sup>15</sup> The issue is now *why* production

unduly emphasize the sphere of circulation. This is so, because Adorno's project mainly consists in pursuing the ramifications of the “principle of exchange” in all areas of culture and in psychology. It is true that there are some passages in Adorno which suggest that Adorno is aware of the primacy of production, but because of his eclectic and unsystematic style of philosophizing, it is difficult to discern what exactly the role of production for him is.

<sup>14</sup> See Carver (1975).

<sup>15</sup> For passages where Marx explicitly states the priority of production to distribution, to exchange, and to consumption, see MEW 42: 29ff, G 94ff.

dominates the whole economy and determines other moments. In order to understand the primacy of production for Marx, let me first simplify Marx's tetrapartite model of economy. Firstly, the spheres of distribution and exchange closely belong to each other, and together constitute the moments of the sphere of circulation. So, we can substitute them with circulation. Secondly, the sphere of consumption, strictly speaking, does not belong to political economy proper, which deals with understanding the economic *laws* and *regularities*. The act of consumption, for Marx, is an individual and isolated act, through which the product "steps outside the social movement" and gets consumed. It is true that consumption is a necessary presupposition of the economy – without consumption there cannot be any production or circulation – but because of the chaotic nature of consumption, there cannot be any scientific law explaining it.<sup>16</sup> All in all, we can assert that the economy, insofar as its structure and regularity is concerned, is for Marx mainly constructed by the two spheres of production and circulation. The task is now to understand why production dominates circulation. Marx gives two arguments for why production is the determining sphere, which can be called a materialist argument and an economic one. He gives the first argument in his 1857/8 unpublished manuscript the *Grundrisse*, but later abandons it in his 1867 *Capital*. The second argument is his pivotal argument, which he develops in both works.

According to the materialist argument, the reason why production dominates circulation consists in the fact of the material dependence of circulation on production:

The repetition of the process from either of the points, money or commodity, is not posited within the conditions of exchange itself. The act can be repeated only until it is completed, i.e. until the amount of the exchange value is exchanged away. It cannot ignite itself anew through its own resources. *Circulation therefore does not carry within itself the principle of self-renewal. The moments of the latter are presupposed to it, not posited by it.* Commodities constantly have to be thrown into it anew from the outside, like fuel into a fire. Otherwise it flickers out in indifference. (MEW 42: 179–80, G: 254, Marx's emphases)

<sup>16</sup> It is exactly for this reason that Marx in the first page of *Capital* bans the study of various use-values from the sphere of political economy, and asserts that the "discovery" of the use-values is a "work of history." "The use-values of commodities," Marx emphasizes, "provide the material for a special branch of knowledge, namely the commercial knowledge of commodities [Warenkunde]," which is obviously not political economy (MEW 23: 50, C I: 126–27). See also Results: 979, Resultate: 56–57, and Harvey (2006: 6).

Obviously, circulation cannot produce any products; it can function only insofar as the products of labor are produced outside it, and then thrown into it to be circulated. Thus, money, which mediates between commodities in circulation, can only have economic and social significance, Marx asserts, if circulation is related to the sphere of production.

Although the materialist argument has some sort of initial intuitive appeal, it is not ultimately convincing. The fact that circulation *materially* requires production does not mean that circulation is *economically* determined by production. As a counter-example, consider that in contemporary capitalism, there are some major distributive corporations (such as Walmart or Ikea) that determine the process of production (say, in China).<sup>17</sup> Perhaps Marx was aware of the insufficiency of the argument, and this was why he omitted it in *Capital*. So let us now consider the economic argument.

According to Marx, a defining feature of capitalism is the constant creation of surplus-value (or profit). In *Capital*, Marx begins his analysis with the sphere of circulation, as a necessary moment of the totality of economy. His aim is to show how production conceptually “emerges from the chrysalis” [entpuppt] of circulation (MEW 23: 170, C I: 258). The argument is simple and straightforward: circulation cannot create surplus-value, because in circulation only commodities of the same value get exchanged. The individual seller might be able to cheat the individual buyer, but such an act of cheating is only able to change the *distribution* of value. If we take into account, however, the *totality* of economy, it is evident that circulation, with its principle of exchange of equivalents, cannot produce any surplus-value.

Capital cannot therefore arise from circulation, and it is equally impossible for it to arise apart from circulation. It must have its origin both in circulation and not in circulation. (MEW 23: 180, C I: 268)

Marx calls this state of affairs a “contradiction in the general formula of capital.” On the one hand, the very existence of capital is dependent on the circulation of commodities; if there were no circulation, the products of labor would remain personal, and would not enter into social metabolism. On the other hand, as we have learned, circulation by itself cannot produce surplus value, as in circulation only the equivalents get exchanged.

<sup>17</sup> See also Harvey (2012: 14ff), who offers a similar argument about the inadequacy of the materialist reading. The example of Walmart is also Harvey’s.



According to Marx, this so-called contradiction in the general formula can be resolved only if we assume that there is *one* specific commodity, which gets exchanged at its full value in the sphere of circulation, but has the capacity to produce more value than what it already embodies. This specific commodity is "labor-power," Marx asserts, "whose use-value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value, whose actual consumption is therefore itself an objectification of labor, hence a creation of value" (MEW 23: 181, C I: 270). That is to say, labor-power saddles the sphere of circulation and the sphere of production. Insofar as its exchange value is concerned, it gets exchanged *within* the sphere of circulation and strictly follows the law of exchange of equivalents. Insofar as its use-value is concerned, it falls *outside* the sphere of circulation, and within the sphere of production, since the use-value of labor-power is the production of value itself.

Note how Marx dialectically derives production from the conceptual insufficiencies unveiled in the exposition of circulation. Circulation cannot, on its own, yield surplus value. The inadequacy of the sphere of circulation leads to the derivation of the totality of capital, which is the unity of circulation and production. Although both moments – circulation and production – are constitutive of capital, it is the production that is the predominating moment. For it is through the sphere of production that surplus value is created. We can now make sense of Marx's enigmatic phrase, cited earlier, that production not only predominates circulation but also "predominates . . . over itself, in the oppositional definition of production" (MEW 42: 34, G 99). For Marx, production in capitalism is necessarily constituted by two moments: the process of producing use-values (shoes, computers, food, etc.), and the process of producing surplus-value (or profit). That production predominates over itself means that in capitalism it is the production of surplus-value that determines the production of use-values.<sup>18</sup> To return to the case of Walmart and Ikea, we can say that although those distributive corporations might organize the production process, it is the creation of surplus value in the sphere of production that is ultimately the defining feature of the economy. We should, therefore, conclude that the reason why production dominates circulation is economical, and is not due to Marx's so-called materialism.

<sup>18</sup> See Harvey (2012: 15).

4.2.3 *The Dialectical Unity of Circulation and Production*

Marx's conception of capital as the dialectical unity of production and circulation is greatly influenced by Hegel's conception of essence as the dialectical unity of essence and appearance. The *essence* of capital, for Marx, is the creation of surplus-value which occurs in the sphere of production. However, the value created in production is of no avail, unless it *appears* in the market. We can summarize the main points of the dialectical conception of essence and appearance in Hegel and in Marx in the following way: (1) For Hegel, "essence *must* appear" (EL §131, my emphasis). If essence does not appear, it ceases to be essence. For Marx, the value created in the sphere of production must be "realized" [verwirklicht] in the market. If the product of labor, which already contains value, cannot be sold on the market, it loses its entire value. (2) For Hegel, essence does not exclude appearance. Essence rather is constituted through the relation of essence and appearance. In other words, appearance functions as a necessary moment of the totality of essence. For Marx, production does not exclude circulation. Rather, capital qua the totality of production is the unity of production and circulation. Thus, circulation functions as a necessary moment of the totality of production.<sup>19</sup> (3) For Hegel, although it is essence that determines appearance, nonetheless, appearance retains some degree of independence, such that it can undergo changes on its own accord. The changes in appearance can potentially react back on essence, and force essence to re-adjust and re-define itself as essence. The same dynamic conception of the relation of essence and appearance holds for Marx. Although it is production that defines the market or circulation, the market or circulation is nonetheless not simply, as it were, a slave of production. Rather, the market to some extent remains independent, such that changes in the market can potentially force production to adjust itself to the demands of the market.<sup>20</sup> (4) For Hegel, there is always the possibility of *mistranslation* between essence and appearance. Something which purportedly was essential, upon its appearing, might prove to be

<sup>19</sup> This point – that production is constituted through the relation of production to circulation – also explains why Marx uses the term "production" in two ways, one narrower, and the other broader. The narrower conception refers to the sphere of production, while the broader refers to "relations of production" as the unity of production and circulation.

<sup>20</sup> In Chapter 1, I explained how for Marx the market (and correspondingly, the equality and freedom that obtains through it) is a "semblance" that conceals essence. There is no inconsistency involved here. If circulation is regarded as self-standing by itself, or simply as all that there is, it indeed functions as "semblance" [Schein]. But if the market is derived from the structure of capital, and is accordingly related to the sphere of production in a constitutive way, then circulation functions as the true expression of essence, namely as its appearance [Erscheinung].

unessential. The same holds for Marx. A commodity that is produced with a certain value might be sold with a lesser or greater value, or even might lose its entire value if it cannot be sold. The logic of the market reacts back on the sphere of production to some degree, and retroactively determines what counts as essential in production.

The dialectical conception of capital as the unity of production and circulation underpins Marx's complex architectonic of presentation in *Capital*. Throughout that work Marx deals with capital as the unity of production and circulation, but his focus changes. In the first volume, called "The Process of Production of Capital," Marx focuses on production, which is the essence of capitalism. Correspondingly, he presupposes that circulation works smoothly, and therefore there is no value created in production that cannot be realized (sold) in the market. By abstracting from the sphere of circulation, Marx thereby manages to elaborate on issues specifically related to production such as the length of the working day, the influence of the workers' struggle on the working day, technological innovation in production, etc. By contrast, in the second volume, called "The Process of Circulation of Capital," Marx methodologically abstracts from production to elaborate on the appearance of capital in the market. By doing so, he thereby discusses issues related to the sphere of circulation that cannot be discussed in the framework of the first volume, such as the effect of circulation time on production or the blockages in circulation that could potentially halt the process of production. Finally, it is in the third volume, called "The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole" that Marx discusses capital as the dialectical unity of production and circulation, and develops his accounts of concrete issues, such as the tendency of the general rate of profit to fall, that can be explained only on the basis of addressing capital in its totality.<sup>21</sup>

For Hegel, we may recall, the dialectic of essence and appearance is insufficient, since the two totalities of essence and appearance, although interrelated, remain ultimately distinct from each other, and thus the relation between them cannot be adequately determined. In Hegel's logic, the category that follows the dialectic of essence and appearance is "actuality." Actuality is a *unity* of the determining (essence) and the determined (appearance). In other words, actuality has the ability to

<sup>21</sup> A very clear articulation of the structure of the whole book can be found at the beginning of the third volume (see MEW 25: 33, C III: 117). Harvey also gives a helpful account of the architectonic of *Capital* in several of his works, although he does not seem to acknowledge the Hegelian roots of Marx's conception. See, for example, Harvey (2018: Chapter 2).

determine *itself*, and by doing so, be determinate. Thus, actuality for Hegel has a *self*-referential character:

Actuality is the unity of essence and existence [Existenz], of inner and outer, that has immediately come to be. The expression of the actual is the actual itself, so that in the expression it remains something equally essential and is something essential only insofar as it is in immediate external existence. (EL §142)

As in actuality the determining and the determined are one and the same, actuality is effectively the *cause of itself*. That is, actuality has a *sui generis* character, it is able to reproduce and maintain itself. Although Marx does not explicitly refer to Hegel's actuality, I will show in the following that his account of capital is greatly influenced by Hegel.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Marx solves the problem of the unity of the two distinct totalities of production and circulation through his conception of the "circuit" [Kreislau] of capital. For Marx, it is precisely the circuit of capital that gives capital a self-referential character and makes it *sui generis*. Let us now turn to the circuit of capital.

### 4.3 The Circuit of Capital

According to Marx, capital takes on the following circuit [Kreislau]:<sup>23</sup>

M—C (MP and L) . . . P . . . C'—M'

Capitalism, to use a phrase from Sraffa, is a system of "production of commodities by means of commodities." In the formula above, M stands for the initial money that is advanced. This money is used to purchase two sets of commodities: means of production (MP) and labor-power (L). Through the process of production (P), which involves the labor process, a new kind of commodity (C') is produced. As surplus-value is created through the process of production, the new commodity has more value than the value of MP and L combined. The value of this new commodity is realized when it is sold on the market, and that results in the return of money (M') which is more than the initial money advanced.

For Marx, capital is this process of "valorization of value" [Verwertung des Wertes]; the value that is initially advanced (in the form of M) gets augmented at the end of the process (in the form of M'). According to

<sup>22</sup> See also Sekine (1984 I: 454–55) and Bell (2009: 91), where it is argued that capital as the unity of production and circulation accords to Hegel's actuality.

<sup>23</sup> The term "circuit" [Kreislau] has to be distinguished from the term "circulation" [Zirkulation]. While the latter refers to the process of buying and selling commodities that have already been produced, the former describes the circular motion of capital as a whole; see Bell (2009: 82).

classical political economy, which has a reified conception of capital, capital is some "stock" of either money or commodities. In contrast, Marx defines capital in a *relational* way. Capital is not money in isolation, or commodities or means of production in isolation, or the activity of production in isolation, but the *movement* that relates all of them together. More precisely, for Marx capital is a "value in process" [prozessierender Wert] that successively takes on the form of money, production, and commodity. Marx uses the phrase "metamorphoses of capital" to explain the transformation of capital: a butterfly changes its form from larva, to chrysalis, to moth, while remaining the same butterfly through its metamorphosis. Similarly, capital for Marx changes its form from money, to production, to commodity, while remaining capital throughout the movement. Importantly, for Marx capital is not a one-time activity of investment and making surplus-value (or profit), but the *incessant* and *infinite* process of re-investing the surplus-value (or profit) already made. Capital, Marx writes,

is constantly changing from one form into the other, without becoming lost in this movement; it thus becomes transformed into an automatic subject. If we pin down the specific forms of appearance assumed in turn by self-valorizing value in the circuit of its life, we reach the following elucidation: capital is money, capital is commodities. In truth, however, value is here the subject of a process in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it changes its own magnitude, throws off surplus value from itself considered as original value, and thus valorizes itself independently. For the movement in the course of which it adds surplus-value is its own movement, its valorization is therefore self-valorization. (MEW 23: 169, C I: 255)

For Marx, therefore, money, commodities, and productive activity are not externally related; rather each functions as a moment of capital, which is "the dominant subject" [das übergreifende Subjekt] that relates them all. Thus, while (say) money is transformed into commodities, it is in fact capital that transforms itself from one shape to another. While clearly having Hegel in mind, Marx emphasizes that capital is

a self-moving substance [sich selbst bewegende Substanz] which passes through a process of its own, and for which commodities and money are both mere forms. But there is more to come: instead of simply representing the relations of commodities, it now enters into a private relationship with itself, as it were. It differentiates itself as original value from itself as surplus-value, just as God the Father differentiates himself from himself as God the Son, although both are of the same age and form, in fact one single person;

for only by the surplus-value of £10 does the £100 originally advanced become capital, and as soon as this has happened, as soon as the son has been created and, through the son, the father, their difference vanishes again, and both become one, £110. (MEW 23: 16, C I: 256)

It is noteworthy that Marx here is distancing himself from his earlier nominalist position. While in his youth Marx regarded concepts to be mere mental abstractions copied from external reality, in his mature period, in the case of the concept of capital, he becomes a conceptual realist: the concept of capital, although abstract, is real and effective in the world.

Those who consider the autonomization [Verselbständigung] of value as a mere abstraction forget that the movement of industrial capital is this *abstraction in action*. Here value passes through different forms, different movements in which it is both preserved and increases, is valorized. (MEW 24: 109, C II: 185, my emphasis)

We see clearly that Marx's conception of capital closely echoes Hegel's conception of actuality. While for Hegel actuality is the "self-moving of form" that has the *power* to organize and reorganize itself, for Marx capital is a "self-moving totality" that has the *power* to repeat and sustain itself. While for Hegel actuality is not a petrified *thing*, and its identity obtains solely through its *motion*, for Marx capital "can only be grasped as a movement, and not as a static thing" (MEW 24: 109, C II: 185).

For Marx, "continuity is the characteristic feature of capitalist production" (MEW 24: 106, C II: 182). Of course, there is some sort of continuity in previous societies (insofar as social life has to be reproduced in those societies), yet the continuity in capitalism is more intense, and more importantly has a qualitatively different character. In subsistence economies, the primary goal of production is satisfaction of needs. When the needs are met, the production of goods ceases. By contrast, in capitalism the primary goal of production is valorization of value (or profit making). Since there is neither an end nor a measure to valorization of value, production never stops; it continues ad infinitum. Continuity therefore in capitalism acquires an autonomous character, independently of the fulfillment of needs. From the ontological point of view, it is exactly the continuity of the process of valorization of value that makes capital a unity. It is only *if* different forms of capital – i.e., money, production, and commodity – continuously succeed each other that *at any given time* the different forms could *coexist* with each other: "The coexistence [of different forms of capital] is itself only the result of the succession" [Das

Nebeneinander ist selbst nur Resultat des Nacheinander] (MEW 24: 107, C II: 183).<sup>24</sup> That the identity of capital is achieved solely through the continuity of its different moments implies that an interruption in *any* of the moments disrupts the function of capital as a whole. Thus, if a commodity that is produced cannot be sold (through, say, lack of effective demand), or if the process of production is interrupted (say, through a strike by the workers), or if money is available but the raw materials or means of production cannot be bought (say, through problems in transportation, or through political sanctions), the whole process comes to a halt. This point – that any disruption in any part of the circuit affects the whole circuit – has important implications for Marx's theory of crises, as well as for anti-capitalist struggles that aim to combat the autonomy of capital. Explication of these implications of course lies beyond the scope of this book.

The incessant continuity of the circuit of capital gives it a further feature. As capital for Marx is a self-repeating movement, properly speaking, there is no beginning or end to capital. In *Capital Volume II*, Marx engages in an elaborate discussion of three different circuits of capital, as they appear to agents involved in production: (1) "Money capital," which begins with money, and ends with more money, following the formula mentioned above:  $M—C \dots P \dots C'—M'$ . Money capital is thus money that begets more money. (2) "Productive capital," which begins with production and ends with production, and thus has the following formula:  $P \dots C'—M'—C \dots P$ . (3) "Commodity capital" which begins with a commodity impregnated with surplus-value and ends with another commodity, and has the following formula:  $C'—M'—C \dots P \dots C'$ . We can better understand the three different forms of capital if we consider capital from the point of view of the agents involved in the economic process. From the point of view of the *financial* capitalist, capital is investing money to draw more money (Circuit 1). From the point of view of the *industrial* capitalist, capital is the incessant production of commodities that can be sold on the market (Circuit 2). From the point of view of the *commercial* capitalist, capital consists in continuously buying and selling commodities (Circuit 3). *Objectively*, capital is the constant renewal of the whole process that does not have any beginning or end;<sup>25</sup> but *subjectively* speaking, capital may

<sup>24</sup> See also MEW 24: 108, CII: 184.

<sup>25</sup> In fact, Marx writes, "the entire circuit [of capital] is the actual unity of its three forms" (MEW 24: 105, C II: 181).

appear to the capitalists (depending on their position) to be money capital, or commodity capital, or productive capital.

In a constantly rotating orbit, every point is simultaneously a starting-point and a point of return . . . . Thus we have seen that not only does every particular circuit (implicitly) presuppose the others, but also that the repetition of the circuit in one form includes the motions which have to take place in the other forms of the circuit. Thus the entire distinction presents itself as merely one of form, a merely subjective distinction that exists only for the observer. (MEW 24: 105, C 2: 180–81)<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.4 . . . and the Critique of Ideology

One prominent form of ideology, we saw in Chapter 1, is the confusion of semblance with essence. Ideological thinking regards the seeming as self-standing, and thus disregards the totality of which the seeming is merely a moment. We have also learned that ideology is “the interfolding of truth and falsity.” The ideological judgment is factually true but it becomes one-sided, and therefore false, when it is regarded within the totality of essence. In the current context, Marx’s development of the concept of capital – as a totality consisting of the three circuits of commodity-capital, money-capital, and productive capital – offers us an opportunity to look at how he criticizes two prominent instances of ideological thought in classical political economy, namely, mercantilism and physiocracy. I do not intend to discuss the function of these ideologies in their historical context – namely how mercantilism represented the interests of the rising class of merchants, and physiocracy the interests of feudal landlords in the context of emerging capitalism. What I intend to do is to look at Marx’s critique of these ideologies at the theoretical level.

The mercantilists believed that the real source of wealth is money, and that it is money that procures more money. Mercantilists, according to Marx, were of three types (in increasing order of sophistication). The first group believed that money has the capacity to beget more money without any intermediary ( $M-M'$ ), i.e., through interest. The second group believed that the main source of wealth is trade, that is to say through buying cheap and selling dear ( $M-C-M'$ ). And the third group, which

<sup>26</sup> Also: “If we take all three forms together, then all the presuppositions of the process appear as its result, as presuppositions produced by the process itself. Each moment appears as a point of departure, of transit, and of return. The total process presents itself as the unity of the process of production and the process of circulation; the production process is the mediator of the circulation process and vice versa” (MEW 24: 104, C II: 180).



historically emerged with burgeoning industry, accepted the necessity of production yet still believed that it is ultimately money that is the real source of wealth: production is thus only a means for the creation of money.<sup>27</sup> Marx criticizes the “crude realism” of the first two types, with the simple argument already mentioned, namely that circulation can only change the *distribution* of wealth; it cannot *produce* wealth. For Marx, these two types, which do not see the necessity of the sphere of production for the creation of wealth, are ideologies of the purest sort. About the third form, Marx writes,

The formula  $M—C \dots P \dots C'—M'$ , with the result  $M' = M + m$  [i.e., surplus value], contains in its form a certain deception [Täuschung]; it bears an illusory character [illusorischen Charakter] that derives from the existence of the advanced and valorized value in its equivalent form, in money. What is emphasized is not the valorization of the value, but the *money form* of this process, the fact that more value in the money form is finally withdrawn from the circulation sphere than was originally advanced to it, i.e. the increase in the mass of gold and silver belonging to the capitalist. (MEW 24: 66, C II: 140)

It is true, according to Marx, that in capitalism money can beget money through interest, that trade can procure money, and that investment can be profitable; but all these presuppose the capitalist mode of production *in its totality*, which incorporates its class relation. That is to say, although it is true that the circuit of money-capital can produce more money, nonetheless if this fact is regarded as self-standing, and in isolation from the circuit of capital in its entirety (which includes also productive capital and commodity-capital), the very same fact becomes false. Thus, the neglect or forgetting of the point of view of totality is exactly the source of the ideology of mercantilism, with its deification of money. Marx concludes that

The illusory character of  $M—C \dots P \dots C'—M'$ , and the corresponding illusory significance it is given, is there as soon as this form is fixated as the sole form, not as one that flows and is constantly repeated; i.e. as soon as it is taken not just as *one* of the forms of the circuit, but rather as its *exclusive* form. However, [in truth] it [i.e., this form] itself refers to other forms. (MEW 24: 66–67, C II: 141–42, my emphasis)

Let us now turn to Marx's critique of physiocracy. According to the physiocrats, the only source of wealth is agriculture. For them, trade and

<sup>27</sup> See MEW 42: 246, G: 327–28.

industry only transfer the value already created in agriculture. Marx criticizes physiocrats for not having seen that labor in general is the source of value, and for having restricted the productive activities only to agriculture; yet at the same time he praises them, since “the physiocrats transferred the inquiry into the origin of surplus value from the sphere of circulation into the sphere of immediate production, and thereby laid the foundation for the analysis of capitalist production” (MEW 26.1: 14, MECW 30: 354).

However, the physiocrats made an error which was the mirror image of that of the mercantilists. Whereas the mercantilists believed that it is circulation alone that is the source of value, the physiocrats believed that it is production alone that is the source of value. (Thus, the formula of physiocracy is  $P \dots P'$ .) It is no surprise that they considered agriculture to be the sole source of value, since agriculture is “that branch of production which can be thought of in complete separation from and independently of circulation, of exchange; and which presupposes exchange not between man and man, but only between man and nature” (MEW 26.1: 19, MECW 30: 358). Indeed, the physiocrats ascribed the capacity of agriculture to create surplus value to the intrinsic fertility of the soil, and therefore regarded it as “a *gift of nature*” (MEW 26.1: 22, MECW 30: 361).<sup>28</sup> That is, by excluding circulation from their analysis, the physiocrats in effect disregarded the *social* character of production. Their economic theory is therefore a *natural* economic theory. It cannot grasp the historical specificity of the capitalist mode of production, which is based on the universalization of the relations of exchange. According to Marx, it is true that production is the source of wealth, but if this truth is regarded in isolation from the process of circulation, it becomes ideological and false. We must conclude that, for Marx, both mercantilism and physiocracy are ideology, since they fixate on or reify the seeming, and do not see it as a moment of total social process.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4.5 The Reproduction of Capital

Capital is akin to Hegel’s actuality, we have learned, since it is *sui generis* and has the capacity to regenerate and maintain itself. On further reflection, however, we need to qualify this claim.

The individual capital, on its own, is not able to reproduce itself, as it needs to purchase means of production and consumer goods from other

<sup>28</sup> See also Roncaglia (2005: 97).

<sup>29</sup> For a helpful discussion of Marx’s critique of mercantilism and physiocracy, see Elster (1985: 494ff).

capitals. It also needs to sell its products to other capitals. The individual capitals are therefore all interlinked with each other, and together constitute the "total social capital" [das gesellschaftliche Gesamtkapital]. Although the individual capital has some degree of autonomy, its autonomy is eventually dependent on and constrained by the total social capital. Thus, Marx writes,

But each individual capital forms only a fraction of the total social capital, a fraction that has acquired independence and been endowed with individual life, so to speak, just as each individual capitalist is no more than an element of the capitalist class. The movement of the social capital is made up of the totality of movements of these autonomous fractions, the turnovers of the individual capitals. Just as the metamorphosis of the individual commodity is but one term in the series of metamorphoses of the commodity world as a whole, of commodity circulation, so the metamorphosis of the individual capital, its turnover, is a single term in the circuit of the social capital. (MEW 24: 351–52, C II: 437)

In Part III of *Capital Volume II*, Marx undertakes a close analysis of the circulation process of the *total social capital*, which he calls the "reproduction" [Reproduktion] of capital. It is in the reproduction of capital that the "actuality" of capital in its full sense obtains. The reproduction of capital is therefore the true totality of capital, and retrospectively provides the bedrock for the other determinations discussed so far.<sup>30</sup> It is at the level of the total social capital that the sui generis character of capital in its optimal form obtains. We should note at the outset, however, that the relation of total social capital and individual capitals is by no means harmonious. The laws and regularities of the total social capital obtain by virtue of the competition of individual capitals, through which the less profitable capitals are demolished. While the individual capital therefore can perish, the total social capital continues to reproduce itself as long as capitalism exists.

In the reproduction of capital, Marx's basic question is this: how can capitalism, which is an anarchic mode of production based on private property and the private investments of individuals, reproduce itself in its entirety? Given the lack of central economic planning, what ensures the continuous growth of the capitalist economy as a whole?<sup>31</sup> In posing this

<sup>30</sup> In *philosophical* works on Marx, the chapter on reproduction of capital is rarely discussed. This is unfortunate, as it is ultimately in the reproduction of capital that the unity of capital obtains. In *economic* works on Marx, the reproduction of capital is discussed at length, but the dialectical nature of Marx's conception is usually ignored. It seems that the excessively disciplinary character of contemporary academia cannot do justice to Marx, who was both a philosopher and an economist.

<sup>31</sup> See Mandel (1978: 16).

question, Marx's source of inspiration was François Quesnay (1694–1774), an economist as well as physician at the court of Louis XV. As a physician, he took a great interest in William Harvey's discovery of the circulation of blood. Before Harvey, Galen's theory had been predominant. For Galen (to simplify), blood is produced in the liver, and is transferred to the heart. The heart then distributes the blood to all the organs, where it is consumed. In Galen's view there is thus a one-way street from the heart to the organs, and no return of blood from the organs to the heart. For Harvey, by contrast, the nutrients enter the blood and are taken out of it, but the blood is not consumed; rather it moves in a closed circuit in the body. Harvey provided a detailed anatomical description of the heart and the circulatory system as a whole, and showed the precise mechanism of circulation.<sup>32</sup> In his 1758 *Tableau économique*, inspired by Harvey's revolutionary discovery, Quesnay applied the same concept to the body politic. He thereby provided an elaborate mechanism to show how society as the totality of economy is reproduced through the interconnection of its different sectors.<sup>33</sup> Quesnay was a physiocrat, who believed that value is created only in agriculture. As we saw, Marx rejected the idea that the source of value is in agriculture alone, yet he embraced Quesnay's holistic way of thought.<sup>34</sup>

In Marx's reproduction schema, he adopts the methodological presupposition that the totality of the economy in capitalism is a *closed* system. This implies that capitalism has permeated the economy in its entirety such that no segment of the economy is defined by a precapitalist (agrarian or otherwise) mode of production. Moreover, Marx presupposes that the state does not interfere in the economy, and that the economy is solely regulated by competition between individual capitals. These two presuppositions enable Marx to set out the *immanent* logic of the total social capital, namely, how the total social capital is reproduced on its own.

The reproduction schemas have been the subject of intense debate in economics texts on Marx. I don't dare to broach this discussion here, but content myself with an extremely brief sketch. Marx divides the total social

<sup>32</sup> For a helpful discussion of William Harvey's discovery, and how it proved to be revolutionary in the history of the sciences, see Butterfield (1957: Chapter 3). See also David Harvey (2013: 329–30).

<sup>33</sup> For a brief and precise description of Quesnay's model, see Roncaglia (2005: 97ff). For Marx's own description and evaluation of Quesnay, see *Theories of Surplus Value, Volume One*, Chapter 6 (MEW 26.1: 282–318, MECW 31: 204–40).

<sup>34</sup> According to Sraffa, "it is of course in Quesnay's *Tableau économique* that is found the original picture of the system of production and consumption as a circular process, and it stands in striking contrast to the view presented by modern theory, of a one-way avenue that leads from 'Factors of Production' to 'Consumption goods'" (Sraffa 1960: 93, quoted from Harvey 2013: 330).

capital, which consists of individual capitals, into two overarching departments. Department I produces means of production (including machinery, raw materials, energy, infrastructure, etc.). Department II produces consumer goods for the individual consumption of capitalists and workers. Department II, which produces consumer goods, must purchase the means of production it requires from Department I. Also, the capitalists and workers involved in Department I must purchase the consumer goods from Department II. In order for the economy as a whole to function properly, the two departments should be in balance with each other. The required balance has two aspects: (1) The *material* aspect. Department I must produce as much means of production as both departments together require. Similarly, Department II must produce as much consumer goods as both departments together require. (2) The *value* aspect. Since capitalism is not a natural economy in which the products are simply divided in society, but the products have to be exchanged with each other, the connection between the two departments is maintained solely through the flow of money between the two departments. Therefore, there must be some “necessary proportionalities” (Marx’s phrase) or “equilibrium” (in contemporary jargon) in terms of value between the two departments (as well as within each department).<sup>35</sup>

However, since the capitalist economy is based on the *private* investment of individual capitals, there is absolutely no guarantee that the necessary proportionalities obtain. On the one hand, capitalism is a radically *socialized* economy in the sense that all individual capitals are strictly related to each other. On the other hand, such a socialized economy is maintained by *private* individual capitals, which operate independently of each other. Capitalism, therefore, cannot in principle be socially coordinated. Thus, contrary to Adam Smith, who without any argument simply presupposed that an “invisible hand” regulates the totality of the economy for the benefit of all, for Marx the equilibrium can only occur exceptionally, that is, by chance:

The fact that the production of commodities is the general form of capitalist production already implies that money plays a role, not just as means of circulation, but also as money capital within the circulation sphere, and gives rise to certain conditions for normal exchange that are peculiar to this mode of production, i.e., conditions for the normal course of reproduction, whether simple or on an expanded scale, which turn into an equal number

<sup>35</sup> See Heinrich (2004: 137ff). For helpful and brief discussions of reproduction schemas, see also Harvey (2013: 313ff), Mandel (1978: 21ff), and Moseley (1998: 159ff).

of conditions for an abnormal course, possibilities of crisis, since, *on the basis of the spontaneous [naturwüchsigen] pattern of this production, this balance is itself an accident.* (MEW 24: 490–91, C II: 570, my emphasis)

Throughout the three volumes of *Capital*, Marx details how the capitalist economy necessarily produces imbalances that grow over time, and culminate periodically in a serious blockage in the process of reproduction of capital, the blockages that he calls crises. The general mechanism of crises is the tension between the constant expansion of the scale of production of value and its realization in the market that is necessarily populated by relatively low-paid workers.<sup>36</sup> These tensions would, in general, result in the crisis of “overproduction” (where commodities produced cannot be sold), or the crisis of “overaccumulation” of capital (where capital cannot find adequate outlets for investment, which results in devaluation of capital).<sup>37</sup> Classical and neoclassical political economy attribute the emergence of crises to factors *external* to the economy, such as the intervention of the government or natural scarcity. By contrast, Marx shows that crises are *endemic* to capitalism, and result from the inner logic of capital. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx writes of Ricardo that “he flees from economics to seek refuge in organic chemistry” (MEW 42: 646, G: 754), as Ricardo explains the crises through a decline in the fertility of soil, i.e., naturally.

Marx insists that crises, while being destructive for capital, are at the very same time creative for it. He emphasizes that “the violent destruction of capital, [which happens] not by external circumstances [is] a condition of its self-preservation” (MEW 42: 642, G: 749). Through blocking the process of reproduction of capital, the crises disrupt the unity of capital. (For, as we have learned, the unity of capital obtains solely through its reproduction.) However, crises provide the necessary conditions for a substantial reorganization of the economy, a reorganization that eventually restores the process of valorization of value. (Through crises, less profitable capitals perish and merge with large capitals, thus yielding larger capitals for investment. Moreover, the massive unemployment results in

<sup>36</sup> Marx calls this necessary tension a “contradiction”: “Contradiction in the capitalist mode of production. The workers are important for the market as buyers of commodities. But as sellers of their commodity – labor-power – capitalist society has the tendency to restrict them to their minimum price. Further contradiction: the periods in which capitalist production exerts all its forces regularly show themselves to be periods of overproduction; because the limit to the application of the productive powers is not simply the production of value, but also its realization. However the sale of commodities, the realization of commodity capital, and thus of surplus-value as well, is restricted not by the consumer needs of society in general, but by the consumer needs of a society in which the great majority are always poor and must always remain poor” (MEW 25: 318, C II: 391).

<sup>37</sup> See Heinrich (2004: 79).

a reduction of wages, which in turn increases the rate of profit, etc.) That unity, however, once restored, tends to produce imbalances of its own, which result in a new set of crises. Marx thus emphasizes that “crises are never more than momentary, violent solutions for the existing contradictions, violent eruptions that re-establish the disturbed balance for the time being” (MEW 25: 259, C III: 357). For Marx,<sup>38</sup> therefore, the *sui generis* character of the totality of capital obtains not despite crises, but through crises.<sup>39</sup>

The total social capital is *sui generis* in two aspects: (1) Capital is able to reproduce itself *economically*. It can regenerate the process of valorization of value, and derivatively it can reproduce the means of production and consumption. (2) It is able to reproduce itself *socially*. That is to say, it can reproduce the social relation of capital and labor, which is necessary for economic reproduction of capital:

Capitalist production therefore reproduces in the course of its own process the separation between labor-power and the conditions of labor. It thereby reproduces and perpetuates the conditions under which the worker is exploited. It incessantly forces him to sell his labor-power in order to live, and enables the capitalist to purchase labor-power in order that he may enrich himself. It is no longer a mere accident that capitalist and worker confront each other in the market as buyer and seller. It is the alternating rhythm [Zwickmühle] of the process itself which throws the worker back onto the market again and again as a seller of his labor-power and continually transforms his own product into a means by which another man can purchase him. In reality, the worker belongs to capital *before* he has sold himself to the capitalist. (MEW 23: 603, C I: 723, my emphasis)<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Contrary to the standard readings of him, for Marx the crises of capitalism do not *automatically* result in its collapse (therefore, the so-called Zusammenbruchstheorie is wrong). See Heinrich (2016: 182). Crises, of course, result in massive impoverishment of people, but there is no direct link between such impoverishment and revolution. For Marx, in my reading, the crises open up the space for political action; whether the ensuing politics is progressive or reactionary depends on the agency of the people involved.

<sup>39</sup> For Hegel, too, the crises are not merely restrictive, but at the same time can be productive. In his *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel emphasizes the positive role of defect or “lack” [Mangel] for the life of an organism; see Rand (2015). Similarly, in the *Philosophy of Right*, he asserts how through habit and lack of crisis, the ethical life can become petrified and lose its liveliness (PR §151Z). However, one should not push the similarity between Hegel and Marx on this issue too far, since the crises for Hegel tend to re-establish the good that is actualized in organic or ethical life, but for Marx the crises tend to augment the bad that is effective in capital.

<sup>40</sup> Also: “The capitalist process of production, therefore, seen as a total, connected process, i.e., a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capital-relation itself; on the one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-laborer” (MEW 23: 604, C I: 724). See also MEW 6: 410, MECW 9: 214.

In order for capital to be able to sustain itself, there must always be workers who sell their labor-power to capital. This cannot be left to the subjective preference of workers – i.e., depending on whether the workers are willing to work for capital – but has to be obtained objectively. The process of reproduction of capital ensures that the workers are *coerced* to work for capital, since at the end of each cycle of production the product of labor is alienated from the workers, leaving no choice for them but to continue to work for capital. To use Hegel's language, capital is *sui generis*, as it is able to posit its own presuppositions. The availability of workers who are forced to work for capital is the *presupposition* of capital, and capital *posits* this very presupposition through its reproduction. As workers exist only as the presupposition of capital, Marx emphasizes, they belong to capital even *before* they have actually sold themselves to capital.

Finally, what secures the *sui generis* character of the total social capital is the “law of relative surplus population” in capitalism.<sup>41</sup> Contrary to Malthus, Marx argues that there is no abstract natural law of population, and capitalism has its own historically specific law of population. No matter what the natural rate of growth of population is, capital always produces a large number of superfluous workers.

If a surplus population of workers is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, this surplus population also becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalist accumulation, indeed it becomes a condition for the existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms a disposable industrial reserve army, which belongs to capital just as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost. (MEW 23: 661, C I: 784)

For Marx, the existence of a relative surplus population is a necessary *condition* for capital. For one thing, the existence of a large number of unemployed people reduces the wages of those employed. This increases the rate of profit of capital and secures the augmentation of the process of valorization of value. For another, the cyclical alternation between periods of stagnation and growth, which is the visible result of the imbalances inherent in the total social capital, changes the valorization requirements of capital. The “industrial reserve army” ensures that capital, depending on the economic situation, is able to expand or contract the scale of production. Also, it must be noted that the industrial reserve army, being the presupposition of capital, is at the same time the *consequence* of the reproduction of the total social capital, since the competition between

<sup>41</sup> See Bell (2009: 105ff).



individual capitals forces them to increase the productivity of labor through constantly developing labor-saving machinery, which subsequently throws workers out of work.

In conclusion, let us recapitulate Marx's developmental account of the totality of capital. The universalization of relations of exchange makes capitalism a totality that has unity. This totality, at first, is conceived of as the sphere of circulation. However, on further reflection, it turns out that the sphere of circulation requires the sphere of production, since it is only through production that surplus-value is created. Marx argues that capital is the unity of circulation and production, and shows that such unity obtains through the incessant renewal of capital, what he calls its circuit. The circular motion of capital makes it self-referential and *sui generis*. But the *sui generis* character of capital, properly speaking, does not obtain at the level of individual capitals, which may ultimately perish, but at the level of the total social capital. The latter is the cause of itself, since it produces and reproduces its own economic and social requirements. In particular, capital secures its autonomous character through reproducing the relative surplus population, which provides the necessary conditions for capital's thriving.

#### 4.6 The Power of Capital

The totality of capital for Marx, we saw, has a *sui generis* character. That is, capital has a life of its own, and is able to produce and reproduce itself independently of individuals. This already implies that capital has an "absolute power" over the individuals who constitute it; individuals must necessarily do what capital requires them to do, otherwise they perish. Now it is time to discuss the nature of the absolute power of capital in more detail. Then I continue by showing how for Marx such absolute power is at the same time impersonal and nonvolitional.

##### 4.6.1 *Its Absolute Character*

Even in his youth Marx was aware that the totality of society has an autonomous logic that obtains independently of individuals, and that the totality exerts power over individuals. In the *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels write

This fixation of social activity, this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into a material power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now. The social power, i.e., the multiplied productive force, which arises through the cooperation of different individuals as it is caused by the division of labor, appears to these individuals, since their cooperation is not voluntary but has come about naturally, not as their own united power, but as an alien force existing outside them of the origin and goal of which they are ignorant, which they thus are no longer able to control, which on the contrary passes through a peculiar series of phases and stages independent of the will and the actions of man, nay even being the prime governor of these. (MEW 3: 34, MECW 5: 47–48)<sup>42</sup>

Note the dialectical language that Marx and Engels use. The totality of society is produced solely through interaction of individuals (“what we ourselves produce”), yet at the same time it forces individuals to comport themselves according to its logic (“alien force existing outside them”). Marx retains this dialectical conception throughout his career. The main difference is that while in the *German Ideology* he regards the division of labor as the principle of formation of totality, in his mature writings the division of labor loses its privileged explanatory status, and is substituted by the principle of exchange of commodities.<sup>43</sup> Thus, in the *Grundrisse*, in the context of the exposition of exchange of commodities and the totality of circulation, he writes

As much, then, as the whole of this movement appears as a social process, and as much as the individual moments of this movement arise from the conscious will and particular purposes of the individuals, so much does the totality of the process appear as an objective interrelation, which arises spontaneously from nature; arising, it is true, from the mutual influence of conscious individuals on one another, but neither located in their consciousness, nor subsumed under them as a whole. Their own collisions with

<sup>42</sup> See also MEW 3: 27, MECW 5: 245.

<sup>43</sup> The shift of perspective from division of labor to exchange of commodities is important. The division of labor is not specific to commodity-producing societies. There are societies with an intricate network of division of labor in which there is only a minimal exchange of the products of labor (Marx gives the example of an ancient Indian village). In capitalism, according to Marx, the division of labor is guided and determined by the logic of exchange of commodities, and that gives labor in capitalism an “abstract” character, a character that is absent in pre-capitalist social formations: “Indifference towards specific labors corresponds to a form of society [i.e., capitalism] in which individuals can with ease transfer from one labor to another, and where the specific kind is a matter of chance for them, hence of indifference. Not only the category, labor, but labor in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form” (MEW 42: 38, G: 105).

one another produce an *alien* social power standing above them, produce their mutual interaction as a process and power independent of them. Circulation, because a totality of the social process, is also the first form in which the social relation appears as something independent of the individuals, not only as, say, in a coin or in exchange value, but extending to the whole of the social movement itself. The social relation of the individuals to one another as a power over the individuals which has become autonomous, whether conceived as natural force, as chance or in whatever other form, is a necessary result of the fact that the point of departure is not the free social individual. Circulation as the first totality among the economic categories is well suited to bring this to light. (MEW 42: 127, G: 196–97).

This passage is striking, especially if we compare it with neoclassical political economy, which is the foundation of current mainstream economics. The beginning point for neoclassical theory is the free individual who has certain needs. Two individuals enter into the relation of exchange because *before* the exchange they make an estimate of the utility of the outcome in their minds, and intend to maximize this utility. That is, it is up to the individuals to enter or not to enter into exchange. Marx does not deny that individuals have certain preferences in the exchange of commodities, but he holds that the individuals' particular purposes are always already formed in a framework, in a totality, and there is no escape from that framework. In capitalism, I might be free in deciding *what* kind of commodities I would like to exchange, but I am absolutely unfree with regard to the fact *that* I have to enter into the relation of exchange. In the context of the development of the relations of exchange in *Capital*, Marx clearly writes that individuals do what the logic of totality requires them to do, even if they are completely unaware of it: "they do it, without being aware of it" [Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es] (MEW 23: 88, C I: 166). Thus, whereas for neoclassical theory exchange is a *contingent* phenomenon, dependent upon the calculations of those who would get involved in the exchange, for Marx exchange is a *necessary* social phenomenon, which coerces individuals to engage in it.<sup>44</sup>

It is in this context that we can make sense of Marx's frequent designation of the economic laws and regularities in capitalism as "naturwüchsig" (spontaneous or natural), laws and regularities which function as a "Naturmacht" (natural power) over individuals. We need only remind ourselves of his pungent description of the law of value in *Capital*: it "asserts itself like a regulative law of nature in the same way that the law

<sup>44</sup> See Heinrich (1999: 77–78).

of gravity asserts itself when a person's house collapses on top of him" (MEW 23: 89, C I: 168). At first sight, Marx's ascription of naturalness to the social relations in capitalism seems to be at odds with the very pivot of his critique of political economy, since it is the main aim of Marx's critique to show that there is exactly nothing "natural" about capitalism; rather, capitalism is a "historical" product, and for that reason can be abolished in favor of a more humane society.<sup>45</sup> The apparent inconsistency can be resolved when we look again at Marx's critique of the physiocrats. Recall that the physiocrats hold that the source of value is not human sociality, but nature.

For them the bourgeois forms of production necessarily appeared as natural forms. It was their great merit that they conceived these forms as physiological forms of society, as forms arising from the natural necessity of production itself, forms that are independent of anyone's will or of politics, etc. They are material laws; the error is only that the material law of a definite historical social stage is conceived as an abstract law governing equally all forms of society. (MEW 26.1: 12, MECW 30: 353)

Marx here praises the physiocrats for having conceived of the laws of society – contrary to social contract theorists – as independent of individuals; yet at the same time he criticizes them for not having seen these natural laws as historical. That is to say, when Marx talks of the naturalness of the capitalist economy, he does not refer to nature simpliciter, but, like Hegel, refers to a "second nature which takes the place of the original and purely natural will" (PR §151). The economic laws of capitalism are natural in the sense that they are *inescapable*. That the individuals have to enter into relations of exchange is not something that they can choose. Even if they can subjectively distance themselves from the act of exchange and think that they may be capable of not exchanging, they nonetheless must objectively engage in exchange, which thereby functions as a natural law for them.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, the totality of economy, according to Marx, functions as a "fate" from which nobody can flee. In the *Grundrisse* he writes "individuals are

<sup>45</sup> The "aim" of *bourgeois* political economy, Marx writes in the *Grundrisse*, "is to present production . . . as encased in eternal natural laws independent of history, at which opportunity *bourgeois* relations are then quietly smuggled in as the inviolable natural laws on which society in the abstract is founded" (MEW 41: 22, G: 87).

<sup>46</sup> Adorno discusses Marx's dual stance toward the naturalness of economic laws in capitalism in (GS 6: 347–53). Consider this passage of his: "The natural lawfulness of society is ideology, to the extent it is hypostatized as an immutable given fact of nature. Natural lawfulness is real, however, as a law of motion of unconscious society, as it is pursued in *Capital* from the analysis of the commodity-form down to the theory of economic crisis in a phenomenology of the anti-Spirit" (GS 6: 349).

subsumed under social production; social production exists outside them as their fate; but social production is not subsumed under individuals, manageable by them as their common wealth" (MEW 42: 91, G: 158). Marx's conception of the totality of capital as "fate" [Verhängnis] closely resembles Hegel's conception of the totality of substance as "fate" [Schicksal], and Adorno's conception of the totality of society as "spell" [Bann], which I explained in the previous chapter. For Hegel the power of fate is impersonal and nonvolitional, and for Marx the same holds true, as we will see.<sup>47</sup>

Marx holds that the totality exerts power over all individuals – obviously over workers, but also over the capitalists. The capitalist

shares with the miser an absolute drive towards self-enrichment. But what appears in the miser as the mania of an individual is in the capitalist the effect of a social mechanism in which he is merely a cog. Moreover, the development of capitalist production makes it necessary constantly to increase the amount of capital laid out in a given industrial undertaking, and competition subordinates every individual capitalist to the immanent laws of capitalist production, as external and coercive laws. It compels him to keep extending his capital, so as to preserve it, and he can only extend it by means of progressive accumulation. (MEW 23: 618, C I: 739)

According to Marx, the capitalist must necessarily expand the scale of surplus-value production; otherwise he would not be able to preserve himself as a capitalist. That is, the "coercive laws of competition" do not leave any option for the capitalist but to extend the exploitation of the workers. As the capitalists are also equally dominated by the rule of capital, we must conclude that in capitalism the primary mode of domination is not the domination of capitalists over workers, but the domination of the totality of capital over all individuals, i.e., over both capitalists and workers.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> It is worthwhile to quote two further passages that clearly testify how Marx conceives of the totality of economy in capitalism in terms of a fate. First: "Or how does it happen that trade, which after all is nothing more than the exchange of products of various individuals and countries, rules the whole world through the relation of supply and demand – a relation which, as an English economist says, hovers over the earth like the fate of the ancients, and with invisible hand allots fortune and misfortune to men, sets up empires and wrecks empires, causes nations to rise and to disappear?" (MEW 3: 35, MECW 5: 48) It must be noted that this passage is from the *German Ideology*, and that in Marx's later writings the relation of supply and demand loses its explanatory function, but this is here beside the point. Second, in *Capital*, Marx emphasizes that "the silent compulsion of economic relations sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker" (MEW 23: 765, C I: 899). Note that the grammatical subject in this curious sentence is not the capitalist, but the "silent compulsion of economic relations."

<sup>48</sup> It is worthwhile at this point to evaluate Postone's influential reading of Marx. Postone is right when he claims that "in Marx's analysis, social domination in capitalism does not, in its most fundamental level, consist in the domination of people by other people, but in the domination of people by

However, that the capitalists and the workers are equally dominated by social forces that are independent of them does not mean that there is no difference in the consequences of this domination. According to Marx, “the capitalist is just as enslaved by the relationships of capitalism as is his opposite pole, *albeit in a quite different manner*” (Results: 990, Resultate: 70, my emphasis). Obviously, it is the capitalists who benefit from the system of total domination and find “absolute satisfaction” in it, whereas the workers are systematically deprived of the necessary material and intellectual resources for their self-development.<sup>49</sup>

#### 4.6.2 *Its Impersonal Character*

Since his youth, Marx had clearly understood that domination in capitalism has an essentially impersonal character. In the *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels write that in capitalism the individual is bifurcated into the “private individual” [persönlichen Individuum] and the “class individual” [Klassenindividuum]:

In the course of historical development, and precisely through the fact that within the division of labor social relations inevitably take on an independent existence, there appears a cleavage in the life of each individual, insofar as it is personal and insofar as it is determined by some branch of labor and the conditions pertaining to it. . . . In the estate [Stand] (and even more in

abstract social structures that people themselves constitute” (Postone 1993: 30). However, Postone is wrong insofar as he thinks that the relation of domination of the totality of capital over both capitalists and workers *excludes* the class domination of capitalists over workers. The genetic and dialectical conception of totality in Marx allows him to accommodate class domination within the structure of the domination of the totality over all individuals, and there is no inconsistency involved here. Postone writes that “within the framework of Marx’s analysis, the form of social domination that characterizes capitalism is not ultimately a function of private property, of the ownership by the capitalists of the surplus product and the means of production; rather, it is grounded in the value form of wealth itself, a form of social wealth that confronts living labor (the workers) as a structurally alien and dominant power” (Postone 1993: 30). By excluding class domination from Marx’s analysis, I believe, Postone in effect destroys the political potential of Marxian thought. Postone consciously and unabashedly distances himself from the history of the class struggle of workers, and from its theoretical expressions in various forms of Marxism. Thus, he uncritically lumps together all different forms of Marxism as “traditional Marxism,” which he defines as “all theoretical approaches that analyze capitalism from the standpoint of labor and characterize that society essentially in terms of class relations, structured by private ownership of the means of production and a market-regulated economy” (Postone 1993: 7). Contrary to Postone, the private ownership of means of production, as well as the class domination that ensues from it, is essential to capitalism. Postone locates himself in the tradition of Critical Theory, and it is no surprise that he adopts a similar position to Adorno, who appears to take the view that the ground of the domination in capitalism is primarily the market (and not capital).

<sup>49</sup> For a helpful discussion about the difference between the “unfreedom” of the worker and that of the capitalist, see Cohen (1983).

the tribe) this is as yet concealed: for instance, a nobleman always remains a nobleman, a commoner always a commoner, a quality inseparable from his individuality irrespective of his other relations. The difference between the private individual and the class individual, the contingent nature of the conditions of life for the individual, appears only with the emergence of the class, which is itself a product of the bourgeoisie. (MEW 3: 76, MECW 5: 78)

If a capitalist goes bankrupt in capitalism, he ceases to be a capitalist; but a nobleman in feudalism remains a nobleman even if he becomes poor. In capitalism, the private individual becomes distinct from the economic category that he embodies. However, although the individual in capitalism consists of these two determinations, it is eventually the class individual that determines the private individual, such that in the end the personality in general "is conditioned and determined by determinate class relations." The power of a certain capitalist over a certain worker is not by virtue of his (private) individuality, but only by virtue of him being a capitalist. "The class," Marx and Engels emphasize, "assumes an independent existence as against the individuals" who constitute it, "so that the latter find their conditions of life pre-determined and have their position in life and hence their personal development assigned to them by their class, thus becoming subsumed under it" (MECW 5: 77–78).

Later, in the Preface to *Capital* Marx clearly states that individuals in capitalism are primarily conceived to be a "personification of economic categories," "the bearers of particular class relations," and goes so far as to even deny their personal responsibility (MEW 23: 16, C I: 92). The suppression of individuality in capitalism gives social relations in capitalism an *abstract* and *formal* character. While in the *German Ideology* Marx regards the cause of such abstraction to be the division of labor, in his later work he leaves no doubt that such abstraction is the result of the universalization of the relation of exchange. In the second chapter of *Capital*, he states that in capitalism the individuals are primarily appendages to commodities, the "guardians of commodities" [Warenhüter]:

Here the persons exist for one another merely as representatives and hence owners, of commodities. . . . In general, the characters who appear on the economic stage [ökonomische Charaktermaske] are merely personifications of economic relations; it is as the bearers of these economic relations that they come into contact with each other. (MEW 23: 100, C I: 178–79)<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> For a similar statement, see MEW 13: 76, MECW 29: 331.

There is an important distinction between exchange of commodities in precapitalist societies and in capitalism. In the former, exchange is a marginal phenomenon and typically occurs in the form of direct barter of a commodity with another commodity. In the latter, by contrast, exchange is a universal phenomenon and necessarily transpires by means of money. That is to say, in capitalism *first* a commodity gets sold, and thereby is transformed into money; and only *then* can money thus obtained buy another commodity. Direct barter is compatible with a social structure that is based on personal relationships. Those who are involved in direct barter do the exchange *at the same time* and *in the same geographical location*. But once the process is mediated by money, the money that is obtained through the selling of a commodity can be used in a *different time and location* (the money obtained, say, in New York City this year can be used, say, in a distant village in the Philippines next year):

Circulation bursts through all the temporal, spatial and personal barriers imposed by the direct exchange of products, and it does this by splitting up the direct identity present here between the exchange of one's own product and the acquisition of someone else's into the two antithetical segments of sale and purchase. (MEW 23: 127, C I: 209)

As any sort of commodity has to be first transformed into money in order to get exchanged, money serves as the universal equivalent that "extinguishes every qualitative difference between commodities." Money, therefore, serves as a "radical leveler," which makes all commodities qualitatively identical (MEW 23: 146, C I: 229). In capitalism, therefore, "all relations transform into money-relations: taxes in kind into money taxes, rent in kind into money rent, military service into mercenary troops, all personal services in general into money services, and patriarchal, slave, serf, and guild labor into pure wage labor" (MEW 42: 81, G: 146).

In the pre-capitalist modes of production, the social production and reproduction was maintained through *personal* relationships of domination and dependence: between serfs and lords, between slaves and masters, between women and men, between apprentices and masters, etc. In capitalism, as the social metabolism is essentially mediated through money, the personal relation of domination fades away or becomes only second rank in terms of importance. The domination in capitalism is "objective" in the sense that it is independent of *any* individual, and therefore, Marx says, "abstract":

These *objective* dependency relations also appear, in antithesis to those of *personal* dependence (the objective dependency relation is nothing more



than social relations which have become independent and now enter into opposition to the seemingly independent individuals; i.e. the reciprocal relations of production separated from and autonomous of individuals) in such a way that individuals are now ruled by *abstractions*, whereas earlier they depended on one another. (MEW 42: 97, G 164)

In capitalism, social domination is always mediated by the relations of exchange. In a *purely* capitalist society, for Marx, domination based on nature would fade away (say, the domination of men over women would fade away). The relations of exchange are sufficient unto themselves to produce dependence, and hence domination. Indeed, "the exchange of commodities in and for itself requires no other relations of dependence than those which result from its own nature" (MEW 23: 182, C I: 271). In precapitalist societies it is the power of community [Gemeinwesen] that binds people together; in capitalism, money, as a universal being [gemeines Wesen] which annihilates all distinctions, "is itself the *community* [Gemeinwesen], and can tolerate none other standing above it" (MEW 42: 149, G: 223). Money, that is, is a social substance that inheres in all commodities (and through commodities, in their guardians) and determines them. The power of people over people in capitalism is not an immediate power, originating from some natural relation of dependence, but it is essentially mediated and generated through money-relations. In the previous chapter we learned that for Hegel even the power of one individual over another individual is the manifestation of the power of the totality of substance. Similarly, according to Marx, "the power which each individual exercises over the activity of others or over social wealth in general exists in him as the owner of *exchange values*, of *money*. The individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket" (MEW 42: 90, G: 157). Money is the result of action of *all* individuals; so the power that one individual exerts over another individual through money is in fact the power of social substance, which is manifested in the relation between the two said individuals.

#### 4.6.3 Its Non-volitional Character

Capital is a self-organizing, self-maintaining, and self-reproducing social totality: but does that mean that capital is, precisely speaking, a "subject"? Is capital an "agent" that has free will? It is undeniable that Marx occasionally uses the word "subject" to describe capital. He writes that capital is a "predominant subject," or an "automatic subject," or the "subject of the process" of the valorization of value. And it is undeniable that he

sometimes describes capital as if it has agency. For example, in the context of his discussion of the working day, he writes

Capital takes no account of the health and the length of life of the worker, unless society forces it to do so. Its answer to the outcry about the physical and mental degradation, the premature death, the torture of over-work is this: Should that pain trouble us, since it increases our pleasure (profit)? (MEW 23: 285, C I: 381)<sup>51</sup>

I argue, however, that these locutions of Marx must be read metaphorically. The main interpretive key is when Marx refers to capital as an “automatic subject” [automatisches Subjekt], and not as a genuine subject. The hallmark of genuine subjectivity is freedom. There cannot be any talk of freedom for capital, since capital is solely defined in terms of the necessity of the activity of the valorization of value. By definition, capital cannot but valorize itself, and for this reason capital is an automaton. (A sewing machine sews. It cannot but sew.)<sup>52</sup> To put the same point in Hegel’s language, capital is determined by a law (i.e., the valorization of value) that remains *external* to it. In this precise sense of external limitation, capital must be considered as *finite* (in Hegel’s sense), since true infinity, which is an attribute of subjectivity for Hegel, is not externally limited. The subject for Hegel, of course, is law-governed, but the law is not simply given to it; it is rather posited and assimilated by the subject as the subject’s own law. Moreover, subjectivity for Hegel is essentially tied up with *purposiveness*, which is integral to freedom. Precisely speaking, valorization of value is not the *purpose* of capital, but merely its “determining motive” [bestimmendes Motiv] (Marx’s phrase) which mechanically fixes the activity of capital. We should thus grasp that, although capital has the structure of a self in that it is able to maintain and reproduce itself, this selfhood does not amount to genuine subjectivity. Thus, to use Hegel’s words, capital is a “substance” but it is emphatically *not* Geist or the Concept.<sup>53</sup>

In Chapter 3, I argued that for Hegel the power of the totality of substance over individuals is nonvolitional, and that the nonvolitional

<sup>51</sup> Or consider this passage: “Capital is dead labor, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks” (MEW 23: 247 C I: 342).

<sup>52</sup> See Heinrich (2013: 111–12).

<sup>53</sup> Therefore, Tony Smith’s claim that “capital must be comprehended as an absolute ‘Subject’ in the Hegelian sense of the term” is wrong (Smith 2014: 23–24). Postone also makes a similar error, in that he claims that capital for Marx “possess[es] the attributes that Hegel accorded the *Geist*” (Postone 1993: 75). Positing capital as an agent is not merely wrong as an interpretation of Marx, but has important practical consequences. Namely, if we accept that capital – and not us – is the subject of history, we have effectively deprived ourselves of the very subjectivity that enables us to fight against capital.

power of substance is *always* mediated by the volitional power of individuals over each other. That is to say, in the social ontology based on the logic of essence, the power of individuals over each other is in fact the power of the social slots that they occupy. The social slots are, so to speak, inert, and the power that comes from them is thus non-volitional. However, the social slots, in order to be effective, must be *activated* by real individuals who have consciousness and will. We can now observe that exactly the same structure – the structure in which power is primarily non-volitional, but must necessarily be mediated by the volitional power of individuals – holds for Marx. In *Capital*, in the context of the relation of individuals and commodity, Marx writes,

Commodities cannot go themselves to market and perform exchange in their own right. We must therefore, have recourse to their guardians, who are the possessors of commodities. Commodities are things, and therefore lack the power to resist man . . . . In order that these objects may enter into relation with each other as commodities, their guardians must place themselves into relation to one another as persons whose will reside in those objects. (MEW 23: 99, C I: 178)

In interpreting this passage, we must first note that for Marx the commodity is not a natural thing. It is rather a social institution (obtaining through exchange) specific to the capitalist mode of production. Although the social institution of the commodity exerts absolute power over individuals – individuals *must* present their products of labor in commodity-form – nonetheless, the power of commodity over individuals is always mediated by the action of individuals in exchange. Similarly, later in the book Marx defines the capitalists as the “personification of capital,” as “capital endowed with consciousness and a will” (MEW 23: 618–19, C I: 739). When surplus-value needs to be divided into capital (for re-investment) and revenue (for the individual consumption of the capitalist), “it is the owner of the surplus-value, the capitalist, who makes this division. It is an act of his will” (MEW 23: 618, C I: 738). We must conclude, then, that for Marx the power of the totality of capital over individuals is abstract and nonvolitional, yet the same power becomes actual and effective *only* through the action of real individuals who exercise their volition.

*The Necessity of Totality*

Hegel's claim in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right* that philosophy is "its own time comprehended in thought" can be taken to hold not only for his social and political philosophy, but for all areas of his philosophy. In the case of the *Science of Logic*, whose subject matter is "pure thought," the claim of the historicity of philosophy is more difficult to prove, or even to make sense of. Yet in this book I have endeavored to show that the very categories of Hegel's logic, specifically those of the logic of essence, describe the general structure of society in a specific historical period, namely, capitalism. In this chapter, one of my aims is to show that Hegel's conception of necessity and contingency in the logic of essence is not ahistorical; rather, it captures the specific form that these modal categories take in the modern capitalist world.

A good point of departure is to consider Ian Hacking's argument in his *The Taming of Chance* (Hacking 1990). Hacking argues that the gradual erosion of deterministic laws of causality in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the natural sciences goes hand in hand with the development of statistical thinking in society, and correspondingly the management of society through statistics (in health, insurance, population, etc.). In the natural sciences, instead of strict causal laws that *exclude* chance and contingency altogether, a new conception of natural law becomes prominent that is based on probability, thereby obtaining *through* chance and contingency. In a parallel way, in society statistical laws are discovered that, in contrast to causal laws, do not determine the behavior of *each* particular individual, and nonetheless capture the law-like trends and tendencies in society as a whole. The systematic emergence of chance in the natural sciences and in society, according to Hacking, does not mean that laws have become any less necessary. On the contrary: "The world became not more chancy, but far less so."<sup>1</sup> Quantum physics accepts that nature is at bottom stochastic, Hacking insists, but that

<sup>1</sup> Hacking (1990: 10 and Chapter 1).

has paradoxically enhanced human beings' capacity to predict the necessary course of nature. Similarly, it is only through acceptance of chance in the behavior of individuals that the strict management of society as a whole has become possible. Social laws have a statistical character, yet they are equally inexorable.

According to Hacking, in the realm of philosophy it was Charles Sanders Peirce who first argued forcefully for the existence of chance in nature (Peirce 1892). For Peirce, Hacking argues, the laws of nature do not obtain despite chance, but "evolve out of random processes." Therefore, for Peirce, "chance was no longer the essence of lawlessness, but at the core of all laws of nature."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps because of the impenetrability of Hegel's logic, or perhaps because Hegel had the ill reputation of being a wildly idealist philosopher who endeavored to derive *all* phenomena without exception from conceptual thought, Hacking does not recognize Hegel as an important precursor. Nonetheless, as we will learn in this chapter, there is an ineliminable role for contingency in Hegel's logic, and the necessary for Hegel obtains solely through contingency. My aim is not to compare Hegel with Peirce: indeed, there are important differences between the two, which need to be discussed in another place. Rather, I aim to flesh out the exact dialectical interrelation between necessity and contingency in Hegel's logic, and to show how for Hegel the "power of necessity" [Macht der Notwendigkeit] (EL §151) determines the contingent phenomena (Sections 5.2 and 5.3). I also show how Hegel's conception of necessity and contingency accords with Marx's analysis of the structure of society in capitalism. For Marx, the necessary economic laws of capitalism do not occur despite the vagaries of the market, but through them (Section 5.4). Then, I discuss the shape of freedom for individuals in the logic of essence and in capitalism, showing how such freedom is not about self-determination, but is a kind of freedom that obtains solely through contingency and randomness (Section 5.5). I conclude with a brief critique of pluralism, and argue how in capitalism the celebrated value of pluralism in fact functions as an ideology that extends and deepens the realm of domination of capital (Section 5.6).

### 5.1 The Preliminaries

Hegel's discussion of modal ontology, even judged by the standards of his logic, is quite complex. In order not to lose orientation in the thicket of the

<sup>2</sup> Hacking (1990: xii and Chapter 23).

text, it is helpful to elaborate upfront on three points that can be taken as central to his discussion. These three points are concerned with (1) the reality of contingency, (2) the centrality of actuality in Hegel's modal ontology, and (3) the expanded conception of necessity, one which is not merely limited to causal necessity.

(1) The first point that needs to be settled is that for Hegel contingency is real. Dieter Henrich (1971) has already persuasively argued for this point, and I do not want to repeat his arguments here. I just want to draw attention to the significance of Hegel's thought by contrasting it with Spinoza's. According to Spinoza, "In nature there exists nothing contingent, but all things have been determined by the necessity of divine nature to exist and operate in a certain way" (E1p29). Because we are fundamentally finite beings, Spinoza believes, "the order of causes" of a thing sometimes "escapes us," and because of this ignorance "we" call that thing contingent; but the thing in reality is thoroughly and necessarily determined (E1p33s1). Contingency therefore for Spinoza results from our epistemic failure, and is not real in the world. Similarly to Spinoza on this point, in 1795 Laplace writes,

Given for one instant an intelligence which could comprehend all the forces by which nature is animated and the respective situation of the beings who compose it – an intelligence sufficiently vast to submit these data to analysis – it would embrace in the same formula the movement of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the lightest atoms; for it, nothing would be uncertain and the future as the past, would present to its eyes. (Laplace 1951: 3, quoted in Hacking 1990: 11–12)

In contrast to Spinoza and Laplace,<sup>3</sup> Hegel is quite clear that contingency is real. It is hard to miss the acerbic tone in the following passage where he criticizes those who deny the reality of contingency:

Contingency is to be accorded its due even in the objective world, since it is a form of the idea in general. This holds first for nature on the surface of which contingency has, so to speak, its free sway which should also be recognized then as such, without the pretension (at times erroneously ascribed to philosophy) of intending to find in it an instance of being able to be only so and not otherwise . . . . It is quite right that the task of science

<sup>3</sup> It is also interesting to observe that even a philosopher as skeptical as Hume, who lived in an era of predominance of determinism, accepts determinism in the constructive phase of his philosophy. So he writes, "It is universally allowed that nothing exists without a cause of its existence, and that chance, when strictly examined, is a mere negative word, and means not any real power which has anywhere a being in nature" (Hume 2007 [1748]: 69, quoted in Hacking 1990: 13).

and, more precisely of philosophy in general, consists in knowing the necessity hidden beneath the semblance of contingency. Yet this should not be so understood as if the contingent pertained merely to our subjective representation and that, therefore, it must be completely set aside in order to arrive at the truth. Scientific endeavors that single-mindedly pursue this direction will not escape from the fair-minded reproach of vacuously playing around and being obstinately pedantic. (EL §145Z)

This passage contains several important points to which I will return later in the chapter. For now, I emphasize the obvious point that Hegel is a philosopher of necessity, and regards the task of philosophy as being to explain the necessary principles governing the world. For this reason, although he grants that there *are* contingent things and events, he nonetheless requires philosophy to conceptualize the *necessity of contingency*. It is true that the specific contingent phenomena are not scientifically or philosophically theorizable, but philosophy has to theorize contingency as such and show its necessity in the objective structure of the world. In Henrich's precise formulation, for Hegel "contingency, but not the contingent is necessary; therefore, the particular contingent is not an object of substantial [philosophical] interest" (Henrich 1971: 168).

(2) While reading Hegel's discussion of actuality, possibility, necessity, and contingency in the *Science of Logic*, one can easily get dismayed with the relentless, back-and-forth dialectical transformation of these categories into each other. A pivotal point that helps us to keep track of what Hegel is doing, however, is the centrality of actuality in Hegel's modal ontology. This can also be inferred from the architectonic of the book: the modal categories are discussed in the third and final part of the logic of essence, entitled "actuality," and in the second chapter of that part, entitled again "actuality."

From the systematic point of view, for Hegel the modal categories emerge because the attempt to adequately conceptualize "actuality" fails. As we recall, actuality for Hegel is not to be confused with mere facticity or mere reality. Such mere facticity belongs to the realm of the logic of being, where reality is described – uncritically – as it is. In the logic of essence, by contrast, actuality is described in relation to what is essential. Now in this context, those things or events in actuality that can simply be replaced with other things or events, without actuality thereby being affected, form the "contingent." In contrast, those things or events in actuality that cannot be changed – otherwise actuality would cease to be actuality – are the "necessary." To give an example, the dress code of the

workers of Walmart as an economic institution is “contingent”; the dress code can change without having any effect on the economic function of Walmart. In contrast, the exploitation of the workers and the drive to maximize profit is “necessary” for Walmart. Walmart would not be Walmart – it would lose its “actuality” – if it did not exploit the workers.

Indeed, the centrality of actuality to Hegel’s modal ontology in the logic is in accordance with the centrality of actuality to his philosophy in general. This is one important reason why generations of Marxian thinkers were attracted to Hegel’s philosophy. Adorno, who could not hide both his fascination and his frustration with Hegel, called Hegel’s philosophy the “theodicy of actuality” (GS 7: 116) or the “theodicy of this world” [Theodizee des Diesseits] (GS 6: 300). Lukács similarly considered Hegel’s logic as “*the* ontology, which is true to the actuality” of modernity (GLW 13: 497). The Marxians were fascinated with Hegel’s philosophy of actuality since, on the one hand, they were opposed to the wishful thinking of liberal philosophy, which is in the business of constructing the world as it *should* be; and on the other hand, they were opposed to the positivism of conservative thought, which accepted the status quo, without seeing the immanent “possibility” in actuality that would allow actuality to be changed for the better. Moreover, as Lukács perceptively notes, the centrality of actuality testifies to how Hegel transforms the historically invariant ontology of the early modern period into his own historical ontology. Whereas in the early modern period it is “necessity” that forms the centerpiece of ontology – the model of philosophy in this period is mathematics and geometry – for Hegel the world as it is actually made through history becomes the focal point (GLW 13: 544).

Having emphasized the centrality of actuality for Hegel, let us look at the text to see how Hegel conceives of necessity and contingency in relation to actuality. Here is the definition of contingency in the logic:

The contingent is an actual that at the same time is determined as merely possible, whose other or opposite equally is. This actuality is therefore mere being or existence, but posited in its truth as having the value of a positedness or of possibility. (WL II: 205, SL: 545)

The contingent is “merely possible” in the sense that although it is, it can equally not be; it can change without imposing any change on actuality. Hegel defines necessity in a similar vein. First, he provides a conventional definition of necessity – “*what is necessary cannot be otherwise*” (WL II: 211,



SL: 549) – but then he develops the concept of necessity in relation to actuality:

The *developed* actuality as the alternation of the inner and the outer collapsing into one [als der in eins fallende Wechsel des Inneren und Äußeren], the alternation of its opposite movements that are united into *one* movement, is *necessity*. (EL §147)

As we may recall from Chapter 3, actuality is the “activity,” or the “self-movement of form,” or the “activation of what matters” [Betätigung der Sache] which “translates itself from the inner into outer, and from outer into inner” (EL §147). Now Hegel submits that the *process* of actuality as obtaining through the interrelation of what is necessary in actuality (i.e., the inner) and what is contingent in actuality (i.e., the outer) is the necessary itself. That is to say, there is no possibility that such a process constituting actuality could be otherwise, and for this reason such a process is necessary.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, by defining necessity as the process of actuality that is able to maintain itself in its changing states, Hegel in effect unites “actuality” and “necessity.” As we will see later, this is most manifest in the highest form of necessity for Hegel, i.e., the “absolute necessity,” which is explicitly defined as a “rejoining” [Zusammengehen] of actuality with itself.

(3) Now let us turn to our third guiding point, namely, that Hegel has a much more expansive notion of necessity than our usual conception of necessity. We might tend – under the influence of the mechanistic sciences or perhaps Kantian (but not necessarily Kant's) philosophy – to restrict necessity to causality: what is necessary is that which is *causally* determined. However, as Lenin observes in his notes on the *Science of Logic*,

When one reads Hegel on causality, it appears strange at first glance that he dwells so relatively lightly on this theme, beloved of the Kantians. Why? Because, indeed, for him causality is only *one* of the determinations of universal connection, which he had already covered earlier, in his *entire* exposition, much more deeply and all-sidedly; *always* and from the very outset emphasizing this connection, the reciprocal transitions, etc. (Lenin 1961 [1916]: 162)

For Hegel, Lenin explains, “cause and effect . . . are merely moments of universal reciprocal dependence, of (universal) connection, of the

<sup>4</sup> See also this passage: “This actuality, *which is itself as such necessary*, for it contains necessity as its *in-itself*, is *absolute actuality* – actuality which can no longer be otherwise, for its *in-itself* is not possibility, but necessity itself” (WL II: 213, SL: 550).

reciprocal concatenation of events, merely links in the chain of the development of matter.” For this reason, the complexity of the inter-connection of the phenomena can only – “one-sidedly,” “fragmentarily,” and “incompletely” – be expressed by causality (Lenin 1961 [1916]: 162). Lenin’s observation about Hegel’s logic is indeed true. If we look only at the logic of essence, we readily see that Hegel explains the interrelation of things and phenomena, in addition to cause and effect, in terms of the relation of ground and grounded, condition and conditioned, law and appearance, inner and outer, force and expression, interaction, etc. Causality for Hegel is important, but only as *a* relation among other relations, not as *the* overarching category or as *the* category that strictly excludes other forms of necessary relation. Hegel especially warns against the use of the category of causality in the explanation of Spiritual phenomena and events; the necessity involved in the realm of Spirit is so rich that it transcends any strictly causal laws:

It has become a common jest in history to let *great effects arise from small causes* and to cite as the primary cause of a comprehensive and profound event an *anecdote*. Such a so-called cause is to be regarded as nothing more than an *occasion*, an *external stimulus* of which the *inner spirit* of the event had no need, or could have used a countless host of other such in order to begin from them in the sphere of appearance, to disengage itself and give itself manifestation. (WL II: 228, SL: 562)

The highest category of the logic of essence is “substance,” which Hegel, as we will see later, identifies with “absolute necessity.” Absolute necessity is the *totality* of necessary relations that obtain in actuality, and cannot therefore be reduced to mere causality.<sup>5</sup> Thus, from a Hegelian point of view it is thoroughly insufficient to say that the chain of the revolutions in the Arab world in 2011 was *caused* by the self-immolation of a street-vendor, Mohammad Bouazizi, in Tunisia; rather one has to say that the internal structure or the totality – “substance” – of the Arab countries through a constellation of factors and relations (high unemployment rate, corruption, political dictatorship, etc.) had become rife with instability such that

<sup>5</sup> In the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel explains the primacy of substance over mere causality in the following way: “To the same degree that the Understanding is accustomed to resisting [the idea of] substantiality, it is, by contrast, at home with causality, i.e., the relationship of cause and effect. If construing a content in a necessary fashion is what matters, then reflection at the level of the Understanding makes it its business to reduce that content to the relationship of causality above all. Now this relationship, to be sure, pertains to necessity, but it is only the one side in the process of necessity which is just as much this, to sublimate the mediation contained in causality and demonstrate itself to be a simple relation-to-itself [i.e., substance]” (EL §153Z).

it only needed a trigger to explode. The primacy lies not with the trigger, but with the totality that posits the contingent trigger as contingent. In Hegel's words, "such a petty and contingent circumstance is the occasion of the event *only* because the latter has *determined* it to be such" (WL II: 228, SL: 562). To conclude, causality does not exhaust necessity for Hegel, but is only a moment of necessity.

## 5.2 The Critique of the Cosmological Proof

It is now helpful – as a preparation for understanding Hegel's complex discussion in the logic – to focus on Hegel's *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*, and specifically on his critique of the cosmological proof, which deals precisely with the relation of necessity and contingency. The shift from the logic to the proofs of the existence of God might seem surprising, yet should cause no surprise in the case of Hegel, for whom the two are closely interrelated. In summer 1829, Hegel offered two courses, one on the logic, and the other on the proofs of the existence of God.<sup>6</sup> In the first meeting of the latter, he announced that his lectures were intended to "supplement" the lectures on the logic "not in content, but in form," and that "this doctrine [i.e., the proofs], insofar as it is scientific, and the sphere of logic do not fall outside each other" (WW 17: 347, PEG: 37). Indeed, insofar as the "nature of proof" is concerned, the two are close to each other, since both involve attending to the transitions from less determinate to more determinate categories.<sup>7</sup> However, that Hegel puts emphasis on the proofs of the existence of God does not mean that he simply accepts the traditional theology. Rather, by criticizing the traditional proofs, Hegel in fact develops his own nontraditional, historical, theology. In order to see how, we need first to reconstruct his argument.

We saw that for Hegel necessity is more expansive than causality. Here is the initial definition of necessity in the *Lectures*:

The necessity of an existing thing requires that it stand in connections with other things such that, *in all aspects*, it is *completely* determined by other existing things that function as conditions and causes. It cannot be separated from them or come into being on its own, nor can there be any condition, cause, or circumstance of connection by means of which it could be so separated. (WW 17: 453, PEG: 105, emphasis added)

<sup>6</sup> Jaeschke (2003: 497).

<sup>7</sup> In case of the proofs of the existence of God, the issue is how to make the transition, say, from contingency to necessity (the cosmological proof), or from thought to being (the ontological proof). See Höhle (1998: 189ff) and Albrecht (1958).

That which is necessary, according to Hegel, is completely determined through its relation with other things. The necessary things, Hegel emphasizes, are totally embedded in a network of “*connections of conditions . . . dependencies, connections of cause and effect, rule-governedness of their inner and outer course of actions, laws*” (WW 17: 449, PEG: 102). Now, as Hegel defines necessity in terms of relation, it is to be expected that he also defines contingency in terms of that which *falls out* of this network of relationality. A thing is “contingent,” Hegel writes,

in virtue of its isolation [Vereinzelung]; whether it exists or not does not disturb or alter other things; the fact that it is so little held by them, and that any hold it derives from them is wholly insufficient, gives to them the insufficient illusion of independence that precisely constitutes their contingency. (WW 17: 452–53, PEG: 104)

According to Hegel, the contingency of the contingent consists in its “lack of a *complete connection* with other things,” and precisely because of this, the contingent is an *individual*. (Vereinzelung means both isolation and individuation.) The individuality of the contingent is not a full-fledged and determinate individuality, but an individuality that merely results from *lack* of determination [beziehungslose Vereinzelung] (WW 17: 450, PEG: 103). To summarize, the contingent and the necessary are both actual; but whereas the necessary should be understood in terms of the totality of interrelations, the contingent is that which shows itself as “punctual” and separated from the totality.<sup>8</sup> Or, to put it differently, necessity should be understood in terms of mediation, and contingency in terms of immediacy.

But this is only one side of the story. Hegel makes another set of arguments to show that the reverse is also true. That is, he tries to show that the necessary is *not* relational, and the contingent *is* relational. According to Spinoza, “a thing is called ‘necessary,’ *either* in respect of its essence, *or* in respect of its cause. For the existence of something follows necessarily *either* from its essence *or* in respect of its cause” (E1p33s1, my emphases). We do not need to discuss Spinoza’s theory of causation or essence here; what we need to know is that Spinoza defines necessity in two ways (here translated into Hegelian language): (1) External determination: the necessary is that which is determined by relation to other things. (2) Internal determination: the necessary is that which is immanently sustained. Hegel takes this Spinozist insight and develops it to its logical

<sup>8</sup> Hoffmann (2012: 353).

conclusion. If for Spinoza the necessary is either externally determined or internally determined, for Hegel the necessary is at the same time both externally and internally determined. I have discussed the former point; now Hegel tells us

Conversely, however, since an existing thing stands in a condition of complete connection, it is in all aspects conditioned and dependent and thus completely *dependent*. In necessity alone, rather, do we find the independence of a thing: what is necessary *must* be. Its *having to be* expresses its independence in such a way that what is necessary *is, because it is*. (WW 17: 453, PEG: 105)

If the necessary is completely dependent upon other things, then it is not necessary; since its existence is *contingent* upon the existence of those things. If the necessary is “removed from such a connection,” Hegel emphasizes, “it is isolated” and therefore “at once immediately contingent” (WW 17: 453, PEG: 105). The concept of necessity, according to Hegel, requires independence.

In a similar vein, Hegel argues that the contingent are dependent upon other things. The contingent “do not come from themselves, nor do they proceed by themselves” (WW 17: 448, PEG: 101); if they did so, they would be self-sufficient and necessary, not contingent. The isolation of contingent things is not by virtue of themselves, but by virtue of other things isolating them. That is, while the contingent things enjoy the “illusion [Schein] of independence”, in fact, even for their very independence, they depend on other things.

Hegel's analysis shows us that necessity and contingency are not to be understood in separation from each other. Rather, in the language of the logic of essence, they form a reflection-logical relation – more precisely, a relation of “opposition” – with each other. That is to say, the relation of (a) necessity *and* (b) contingency is in fact the relation of (a) the relation of *necessity* and contingency *and* (b) the relation of necessity and *contingency*. In Chapter 2, we saw how each of the opposing categories is contradictory, since each category contains the other as its moment, while at the same time excluding it from itself. Thus, for Hegel both necessity and contingency are contradictory; yet, as we will see later, their modes of contradiction are decisively different.

We can now understand why Hegel criticizes the cosmological proof of the existence of God. A succinct formulation of the cosmological proof is the following: “*Because* the worldly is contingent, *therefore* an absolutely necessary being exists” (WW 17: 460, PEG: 111). According to Hegel, if we

think of the contingent and the necessary as exclusive of each other, it is not possible to make an *immanent* transition from the one to the other. Rather, “a gulf [Kluft] is plainly fixed between them” (WW 17: 470, PEG: 118). To put the same point differently, in the cosmological proof, the transition from the contingent to the necessary is only externally necessitated, and does not have any “*objective* significance”; but rather is merely present in “a wholly *subjective sense*” in *us* who attempt to make this transition (WW 17: 462, PEG: 112). In contrast to the proof, Hegel believes, one has to think of the contingent as being *already* mediated by the necessary. “The being of the contingent is *not* its own being, but *only* the being of *an other*, and indeed it is defined as the being of *its* other, the absolutely necessary” (WW 17: 468, PEG: 117). Thus, the true transition is not the transition from the contingent to the necessary, which is impossible, but “the transition that is inherently contained in the contingent itself – the transition from one of each of the elements that constitute the contingent to its other” (WW 17: 485, PEG: 130). According to Hegel, the necessary should not be understood in terms of “negation” (i.e., negation of contingency), but in terms of “negation of negation” (i.e., negation of contingency, but in such a way that contingency is already understood in terms of negation of necessity). This is one way to understand the contradictoriness of necessity for Hegel. Necessity results solely through the interaction of contingent things, i.e., it is the result, but at the very same time it is contradictorily present from the beginning, governing the contingent.

It is now clear why Hegel’s theology is nontraditional. In the traditional conception of God, God is a necessity which lies *outside* the messiness of the contingent world. *First*, there is a necessary God, which *then* creates the contingent. In Hegel’s conception, however, there is no cosmogony involved. Rather, necessity is already immanent in the contingent, and only needs to “raise itself up” [sich erheben] from the interaction of the contingent; but in such raising up it has already governed the contingent (WW 17: 462, PEG: 112). For Hegel, such an immanent necessity, which produces and reproduces itself through its relation with contingency, is tantamount to “actuality.” Thus, for Hegel, the most essential being is not an external God, but actuality itself conceived as necessary. In Hegel’s own words, “being in its own essentiality is actuality, and actuality is inherently the relationship between contingency and necessity that finds its complete determination in absolute necessity” (WW 17: 420, PEG: 99).

In Chapter 2, we discussed the asymmetrical relation of opposition, which obtains between the “positive” and the “negative.” The positive is primarily defined in terms of self-identity, which is subordinately related to

the negative to secure its identity. In contrast, the negative is primarily defined in terms of its nonidentity, which is related to the positive as its source of identity. The same logical structure obtains between necessity and contingency. According to Hegel, "being is simple equality with itself; contingency, however, is being that is absolutely unequal to itself and self-contradictory, and it is only in the absolutely necessary that it is once more restored to this condition of self-equality" (WW 17: 467, PEG: 116). However, while the relation of necessity and contingency is at its logical foundation akin to the relation of the positive and the negative, it is nonetheless more determinate. In the relation of the positive and the negative, the negative is, relatively speaking, self-standing. This is emphatically not the case with contingency. For Hegel, "the contingent by its very nature is that which dissolves itself" (WW 17: 485, PEG: 131). In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, he emphasizes that it is in the nature of the contingent to be "eaten up," to be "consumed," to "submerge," to be "demolished," and to be "sacrificed" (EL §146, §147Z). Even the very term "contingency" [Zufall] already suggests "a kind of existence whose special character is to fall [fallen]" (WW 17: 420, PEG: 99). Indeed, when Hegel talks of the "power of necessity" (EL §151), he means that necessity has the power to demolish and annihilate the contingent. To conclude, while both necessity and contingency for Hegel are contradictory – since each relates to the other as its own constitutive moment, while excluding it from itself – the contradiction for contingency is the source of its destruction and annihilation, but for necessity it is the source of its self-identity.<sup>9</sup>

We can make more sense of the nature of contradiction in contingency when we look, for the second time, at Hegel's critique of the cosmological proof.<sup>10</sup> In the Thirteenth Lecture, Hegel reconstructs the conventional cosmological proof in the following way:

- 1 If the contingent exists, then the necessary exists.
- 2 The contingent exists.
- C Therefore, the necessary exists.

<sup>9</sup> Absolute necessity, which Hegel identifies with substance, is the highest category of the logic of essence. That absolute necessity is contradictory shows that it is not possible to supersede the contradiction of essence within the framework of essence – essence is inherently contradictory. The resolution of the contradiction occurs through the transition from essence to the Concept, where Hegel discusses how genuine subjectivity (agency) is possible, in spite of – and indeed through – contradiction of essence (the social structure). Obviously, an adequate discussion of the logical relation of social structure and genuine agency needs another book.

<sup>10</sup> See Hösle (1998: 191–92).

According to Hegel, both premises of this inference are wrong. The first one is wrong since it conceives of the contingent as the ground of the necessary, thereby making the necessary *dependent* on the contingent. Now, if the necessary is dependent on the contingent, this means that its existence is not necessary; rather it is *contingent* upon the existence of the contingent. The second premise is wrong, since it uncritically accepts that the contingent exists. This conception is based on representational thought, and is not able to grasp the conceptual structure of the contingent. Hegel believes that if we think of contingency conceptually, we realize that contingency in fact does *not* exist. That is, “the being of the contingent is not its own being, but only the being of . . . its other, the absolutely necessary” (WW 17: 468, PEG: 117). In other words, the contingent for Hegel is a kind of being whose mode of existence is non-being. Thus, the true inference according to Hegel is the following. Because the contingent is self-contradictory, the necessary exists. In this way we will also have the true notion of necessity: necessity is not, strictly speaking, dependent on contingency, and thereby contingent upon it, but dialectically evolves out of the contradiction of contingency.<sup>11</sup>

That for Hegel necessity evolves out of contingency and does not oppose it in a fixed and unchanging way has important repercussions for Hegel’s conception of totality, and accordingly for Marx’s conception of capital, which I will discuss later. For now, let us turn to the official locus of Hegel’s discussion of necessity and contingency, which is in the logic of essence.

### 5.3 The Dialectic of Necessity and Contingency in the Logic

In Chapter 1 we saw that illusion denotes the givenness of being, but at the same time denotes that such givenness is already mediated by the structure of essence. Although the category of illusion is explicitly discussed at the

<sup>11</sup> In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel explains the transition from contingency to necessity – and similarly, from finitude to infinity – exactly in the same way, which is further evidence why the *Proofs* can be read as supplementary to the logic: “The true inference from a finite and contingent being to an absolutely necessary being does not consist in inferring the latter from the former as from a being which *is and remains ground*; on the contrary, the inference is from a being that, as is also implied immediately in *contingency*, is only in a state of collapse and is *inherently self-contradictory*; or rather, the true inference consists in showing that contingent being in its own self withdraws into its ground, in which it is sublated – and, further, that by this withdrawal it posits ground in such a manner only that it makes itself into the positedness. In an ordinary inference the *being* of the finite appears as the ground of the absolute: because the finite is, therefore the absolute is. But the truth is that the absolute is, because the finite is the inherently self-contradictory opposition, because it is *not*. In the former meaning an inference runs thus: The being of the finite is the being of the absolute; but in the latter: The non-being of the finite is the being of the absolute” (WL II: 79–80, SL: 443).



beginning of the logic of essence, it is used – up to the end of the logic of essence – to conceptualize further forms of the seeming givenness of being. In discussing determinations of reflection, we may recall, Hegel argues that the relation of diversity functions as an illusion. Although individuals seem to be diverse, it turns out that such diversity is an illusion that is mediated by the more fundamental relation of opposition.

The third form of illusion for Hegel is the “illusion of contingency” (EL §145Z). Contingency is that which falls outside the network of relationality of necessity, and for this reason it is immediate and given. Yet such independence and immediacy is an illusion, since contingency, in effect, is already mediated through and posited by necessity. Hegel emphasizes that the task of philosophy is to “overcome the point of view of mere contingency, and recognize it as an *illusion*, whose essence is necessity” (PR §324). And, which is consistent with Hegel, according to Engels, contingencies are “things and events whose inner interconnection is so remote or so impossible of proof that we can regard it as non-existent, as negligible,” and yet amid such contingent things and events “the economic movement finally asserts itself [sich durchsetzt] as necessary” (MEW 37: 463, MECW 49: 35). Note that for Engels there is an endless number of contingencies in history that cannot conceptually be derived from the economic structure of society. These contingencies are real, but they do not ultimately exist for themselves. Rather, contingencies exist for the necessity of economic laws, which are effective through them.

In Chapter 1 we saw that illusion for Hegel is inherently contradictory and unstable: it proposes itself as self-subsistent, but it actually functions as a moment of essence. For this reason, Hegel does not hesitate to designate illusion as an “inherent nullity” [*an sich Nichtige*], and claims that “the being of illusion consists solely in the sublatedness of being, in its nothingness” (WL II: 19, SL: 395). Similarly, with regard to contingency, Hegel claims that “in contingency being or existence is . . . dissected to such an extent that it is at the same time determined to be something that is intrinsically a *nullity*” [*an sich Nichtige*] (WW 17: 456, PEG: 107). Contingency is a nullity, since it does not exist on its own, but exists solely as a moment of necessity.

Accordingly, in the *Science of Logic* Hegel sharply expresses the contradictory nature of the contingent in this way: “The contingent, then, has no ground because it is contingent; and, equally, it has a ground because it is contingent” (WL II: 206, SL: 545). We need to understand more precisely what it means that the contingent both does and at the same time does not have a ground. Indeed, Hegel's conception of contingency and its

contradictory nature undergoes a process of development, which I will reconstruct as follows. My exposition does not exactly follow Hegel's own exposition in the *Science of Logic*, although I believe it adequately reflects its spirit.<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy that the three conceptions of contingency discussed below cannot strictly be separated from each other; rather they form a fluid continuum from less to more determinate forms of contingency.

### 5.3.1 Contingency as Brute Externality

The first form of contingency is that which cannot be derived from the conceptual structure of reality. Whatever can be reached through conceptual development is necessary; whatever lies *beyond* conceptual determination, i.e., whatever cannot be theoretically grasped, is contingent.<sup>13</sup> In this way, the contingent is a brute fact that can be empirically known, but cannot be understood, and there is no rational account of why it is the way it is. In the section entitled "Administration of Justice" in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel emphasizes that there is a "*purely positive* aspect of law" that cannot be dispensed with:

It is impossible to determine by *reason*, or to decide by applying a determination derived from the Concept, whether the just penalty for an offence is corporal punishment of forty lashes or thirty-nine, a fine of five talers as distinct from four talers and twenty-three groschen or less, or imprisonment for a year or for 364 days or less, or for a year and one, two, or three days. And yet an injustice is done if there is even one lash too many, or one taler or groschen, one week or one day in prison too many or too few. It is reason itself which recognizes that contingency, contradiction, and semblance have their (*albeit limited*) sphere and right, and it does not attempt to resolve and rectify such contradictions. (PR §214)

According to Hegel, law, which by definition is universal, cannot possibly by itself be complete. While applying the universal law to individual cases, the law has to be supplemented with contingent decisions that cannot be accounted for through law. The existence of contingency in the

<sup>12</sup> The chapter on modal categories is among the most obscure parts of the logic, and a reconstruction that closely follows the text risks re-doubling this obscurity at another level. For helpful commentaries that are closely based on the text, see Burbidge (2007: 16–47), Hoffmann (1991: 278ff), and Houlgate (1995). Yeomans's discussion is extremely helpful, partly because he reconstructs Hegel's argument not in its purity, but as it pertains to the structure of agency (Yeomans 2012: 131–82).

<sup>13</sup> Thus, there is a structural similarity between the first form of contingency and the first form of illusion at the beginning of the logic, which Hegel discusses under the heading of the Essential and the Unessential. Similarly to the Unessential, which, according to Hegel, lies outside the Essential, here the contingent is preliminarily conceived as that which lies outside the domain of necessity.

process of administration of justice is not a defect of law, Hegel emphasizes, but is exactly that which makes it possible that a judgment can be made. Without such contingency, therefore, law loses its effectiveness and actuality. In other words, the actuality of law necessarily requires contingency as its constitutive moment. It must be emphasized that although the judgment made is ultimately contingent (365 or 366 days of imprisonment), it is not a free-floating contingency, but a contingency whose limits are defined by the necessity of laws (it cannot be 3650 days). That is, contingency is both grounded (on the necessity of law), and groundless (by virtue of the necessity of law giving it a general limit within which it can freely, i.e., without the imposition of law, be materialized). The contingent is, therefore, contradictory; yet its mode of contradiction is under-determinate. It results from a qualitative determination (that imprisonment necessarily has to be imposed) and a quantitative determination (that the imprisonment can contingently be 365 or 366 days) that remain "indifferent" to each other. The "externality" of the relation between necessity and contingency – an externality which is characteristic of the logic of being – has to be superseded.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> There remains one major worry, namely, if we define contingency as that which lies beyond the theoretical grasp, how can we be sure that the boundary between necessity and contingency that we draw is a correct one? The example given is about ethical issues, but the worry is even more pressing in the theoretical domain. It is too easy a solution, so the worry goes, to relegate whatever we cannot currently know to the domain of contingency. In this way contingency functions as a shield for our ignorance, namely, as a pretext that justifies our laziness in not pursuing further theoretical determination. It is not difficult to find examples in the history of science where what had previously been considered as a matter of givenness can now be theoretically explained (see Höhle 1998: 91). This point – that the boundary between necessity and contingency seems to be arbitrary – is in effect the heart of a Spinozist critique of Hegel: namely, if we allow brute facts and contingency in our theoretical considerations, then in principle *everything* could be considered as a brute fact, as contingent (hence, Spinoza's famous explanatory principle, "all or nothing"). Hegel, in my reading, is silent on this worry – and for good reasons. The necessary and the contingent ultimately are not only a matter of logic, but also a matter of concrete historical, social, and scientific conjuncture which takes some things and events as necessary, and others as contingent. The central category of Hegel's modal ontology is "actuality," which has both logical and experiential content. Furthermore, in allowing contingency into his system, Hegel's philosophy is much more congenial to scientific *practice* than Spinoza's. Any scientific activity necessarily has to be selective. That is, it must simply disregard many things and events, and count them as contingent; otherwise scientific practice would not be able to get off the ground at all. If one does not distinguish necessity and contingency, one totally loses one's sense of orientation about what really matters. In his *Dialectic of Nature* (1883), Engels forcefully argues that in the mechanistic conception of the natural sciences, which bars contingency altogether, "contingency is not explained by necessity, but rather necessity is degraded to the production of what is merely contingent. If the fact that a particular pea-pod contains six peas, and not five or seven, is of the same order as the law of motion of the solar system, or the law of the transformation of energy, then as a matter of fact contingency is not elevated into necessity, but rather necessity degraded into contingency" (MEW 20: 488, MECW 25: 500).

## 5.3.2 Relative Contingency

In the *Encyclopedia Logic* Hegel develops the second form of contingency with reference to the category of “condition” [Bedingung]. In the first form discussed above, contingency is conceived to lie beyond the bounds of necessity, and have thus only an external relation with necessity. In contrast, if contingency is conceived to be the “condition” of necessity, it has to have a rather internal relation with the necessary. On the one hand, the necessary is not self-standing on its own, and requires the contingent condition for its existence. On the other hand, the contingent, qua the condition, cannot be understood on its own, and must be conceived as being the condition *of* necessity. Hegel emphasizes that the necessary both presupposes the condition (if the condition does not obtain, the necessary does not obtain), *and* posits the condition as condition (since the function of the condition is primarily to be at the service of the necessary) (EL §146, §148).

In the *Science of Logic* Hegel names this kind of necessity “relative or real necessity” [relative oder reale Notwendigkeit], writing that relative necessity “has a *presupposition* from which it begins; it has its *starting point* from the *contingent*” (WL II: 211, SL: 549). For Hegel, relative necessity is necessary, but it is necessary only given certain conditions and circumstances. As relative necessity is *dependent* on its conditions, it is itself *contingent* (upon those conditions.) In Hegel’s own words, “the really necessary is therefore any limited actuality, which, on account of this limitation, is also only a contingent” (WL II: 212, SL: 550). Note the similarity of relative necessity to the necessity involved in the traditional cosmological proof of the existence of God, Hegel’s criticism of which we have already seen. In both conceptions, contingency is conceived to be the condition of necessity, and thus necessity in both is a limited necessity, not the true “absolute” necessity.

Hegel’s analysis of the relation of necessity and contingency is particularly relevant for his *Philosophy of Nature*. While explicitly deploying the themes developed so far in the logic of essence, Hegel asserts that

In this [i.e., nature’s] externality, the determinations of the concept have the semblance of an *indifferent subsistence* and *isolation* [Vereinzelung] with regard to one another; and the concept therefore is present only as something inward. Consequently, nature exhibits no freedom in its existence, but only *necessity* and *contingency*. (EN §248)

And:

The *contradiction* of the Idea, arising from the fact that, as nature, it is external to itself, is more precisely this: that on the one hand there is the *necessity* of its forms which is generated by the concept, and their rational determination in the organic totality; while on the other hand, there is their indifferent *contingency* and indeterminable lawlessness. (EN §250)

According to Hegel, nature is necessary insofar as it is determined by laws, regularities, and tendencies that persist through time. Yet, insofar as individuals are concerned, nature is contingent. It is impossible to know the behavior of one individual bacterium of a specific species; it is only possible to know the behavior of the bacteria as a species, or in a population, i.e., collectively. And yet the behavior of one bacterium is not purely random, rather it is such that it follows the necessary regularities that the species has. In Hegel's words, "traces of conceptual determination are to be found even in the most particularized object, although these traces do not exhaust its nature" (EN §250). The precise way that individuals are is *beyond* the conceptual determination of the species, yet individuals are at the same time the *condition* of the necessity of species existing and persisting through time. Necessity, therefore, is not opposed to contingency, but obtains through contingency. "Necessity," in Höslé's words, "is namely only that which proves to be unavoidable under contingent, arbitrary cases" (Höslé 1998: 89).

Hegel thus shifts the concept of natural law *away* from a Newtonian-type conception. In the latter, there is a strict dichotomy between necessity and contingency: the laws are necessary and unalterable, and contingency pertains only to the initial conditions. Whether a dropped glass breaks or not depends on the initial height from which the glass is dropped, or the make-up of the glass, or the make-up of the ground on which the glass is dropped – and all these are contingent – but the glass in any case follows the strict law of gravitation.<sup>15</sup> This means that law, in Newtonian-type explanations, is a function whose input is contingently given; but the law itself is necessary. For Hegel, by contrast, law gets its full articulation in biology and the social sciences, and is such that it does not exclude contingency, but obtains through it. Therefore, within the Hegelian framework, one can talk of the *laws of contingency*, a phrase that is incomprehensible within the framework of Newtonian-type explanation. Yet this comes at a price: in the Hegelian framework, it is impossible to

<sup>15</sup> Höslé explains that Hegel can accommodate the conception of "initial condition" (Höslé 1998: 92–93); the example of glass is also Höslé's. But he does not further stress that the Hegelian type of explanation is *fundamentally* different from the Newtonian type.

determine the behavior of one individual through law; it is possible only to know the behavior of essence as a totality.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, insofar as the objective structure of the world is concerned, “individuum est ineffabile.”<sup>17</sup>

### 5.3.3 Absolute Contingency

In Hegel’s critique of the cosmological proof, we saw that it is inadequate to conceive of contingency and necessity as equally subsisting alongside each other. Rather, contingency is to be conceived as a “moment” of necessity, a moment which is simultaneously posited and superseded by necessity. The same argument explains the transition from relative to absolute necessity in the *Science of Logic*. In relative modality, contingency, qua the condition of necessity, has still some sort of independence. For relative necessity, that is, “the *presupposing* [of conditions] and the *self-returning movement* [from conditions] are still separate – or necessity has not yet *out of itself determined itself into contingency*” (WL II: 212, SL: 550). The movement of the real necessity is from contingency to necessity, not yet the movement of necessity “from itself to itself” [aus sich selbst zu sich] (WL II: 213, SL: 550). Now Hegel emphasizes that, whereas in real necessity contingent presuppositions fall apart from necessity, the “presupposition” that the absolute necessity has is “its own positing” (WL II: 214, SL: 551). In other words, necessity produces contingency, so to speak, out of itself:

It is therefore necessity *itself* which determines itself as *contingency*, – in its being repels itself from itself, in this very repulsion has only returned into itself, and in this return, as its being, has repelled itself from itself. (WL II: 214, SL: 551)

This language is highly reminiscent of the determining reflection which posits its own presupposition. Indeed, absolute necessity as the pure relation with itself is the highest actualization of the determining reflection. Absolute necessity posits things as contingent, but only in order to supersede and integrate them within itself as necessary. It is in the figure of “absolute necessity” that we can properly talk of the “power of necessity”

<sup>16</sup> A motivation for the transition from the logic of essence to the logic of the Concept lies in the fact that in the former individuals remain under-determinate. That is, for Hegel, insofar as the objective logic is concerned, individuation necessarily fails. Proper individuation only occurs through “subjectivity”: an individual is he who can say “I” to himself. The transition from the logic of essence to the logic of the Concept has enormous social and political significance – it is concerned with the issue of how “agency” is possible in a “social structure” that tends to reduce individuals to contingency. A proper discussion of this transition needs a separate book.

<sup>17</sup> See Wieland (1995: 7ff).

(EL §151), since, in contrast to relative necessity, the contingent things are now generated by necessity (qua necessity's own moment), *and* at the same time are destroyed by necessity (since they are contingent). That is, the contingent things are simply powerless against the absolute power of necessity.

Hegel also explains the transition from relative necessity to absolute necessity in terms of the dialectic of form and content. In relative necessity, necessity pertains to the form of necessity, and the content is filled from outside, from contingency, which remains external to necessity. The form of necessity is therefore "constrained" by the content. In the figure of relative necessity, the dualism of form and content, or the dualism of necessity and contingency, is still preserved. But in absolute necessity, the content is produced, so to speak, out of the form of necessity. For this reason, Hegel names absolute necessity "absolute form" (EL §149). I emphasize, however, that this does not mean that a cosmogonic process or a creation *ex nihilo* is here involved; rather it means that "the form in its realization has penetrated all its difference [from content] and made itself transparent" such that one can say that now "the distinction between form and content is vanished" (WL II: 214, SL: 551). This implies, in Schmidt's formulation, that "the absolute necessity is not any formalism; although the side of form has become even stronger in it."<sup>18</sup> In other words, whereas in relative necessity the form is indifferent and external to the content, in absolute necessity the form has absolute power over the content, and degrades the content to a moment of form.

Whereas relative necessity is a kind of "law" which obtains through the contingency of individuals, absolute necessity for Hegel is a totality which posits and supersedes individuals. Hegel identifies absolute necessity with actuality itself, and indeed with the highest form of actuality, namely substance. In other words, for Hegel, actuality, once conceived through the modal categories of necessity and contingency, is substance which is able to generate and destroy accidents. Absolute necessity or substance for Hegel is not a premediated One, which *then* manifests itself in the contingent individuals. Rather, the absolute necessity solely obtains through the interrelation of the contingent individuals, but in such a way that it has already governed their general behavior.

In Yeomans's language, in contrast to relative necessity in which there is a "looseness of fit" between the contingent and the necessary, in absolute necessity a "tightness of fit" obtains between the two.<sup>19</sup> Such tightness of fit

<sup>18</sup> Schmidt (1973: 199).

<sup>19</sup> Yeomans (2012: 157).

occurs when there is a fully developed form of totality, such as in organisms, in works of art, or in the structure of agency.<sup>20</sup> In all these forms of totality, necessity and contingency are so interwoven that each individual, in its very contingency and replaceability, can be conceived as necessary and irreplaceable. I now illustrate this point briefly, firstly through Lukács's aesthetic theory, and then through Marx's philosophy of history.

According to Lukács, in works of art there is no "fixed antinomy" between necessity and contingency. Rather, in art contingency has a "friendly and fruitful coexistence with categories that express higher force, order and necessity" (GLW 11: 750). Indeed, for Lukács it is exactly through the incorporation of contingency that works of art acquire the qualities of naturalness, warmth, and liveliness – qualities that are absent in those scientific enterprises that try to eliminate contingency. To give an example from Lukács, when in *War and Peace* the severely wounded Andrei Bolkonsky is laid on the operating table, he accidentally sees his old rival and enemy Anatole Kuragin in the same room, getting his leg amputated. This meeting in this place and time is a brute accident. But the abstractness of this accident is superseded, in that seeing Kuragin initiates an existential crisis in Andrei that is the content of the next part of the book. The development of Andrei's character is continued in the rest of the book through a series of accidental events that eventually leads to a thorough portrayal of Andrei and his relationship with other characters of the novel (GLW 11: 765–66). This transformation of contingency into necessity, Lukács holds, is only by virtue of the "effective power" of the totality of the work of art. This effective power is absent in bad works of art, which can only produce piecemeal gatherings of parts that remain indifferent to each other. In contrast to Tolstoy, Lukács gives an example of a certain writer, Ernst Ottwalt, in whose work necessity and contingency "confront one another inflexibly and exclusively." Accidental events for Ottwalt remain mere accidents. They remain mere "examples" that "can be arbitrarily replaced by other examples," and thus never become necessary.<sup>21</sup>

*Secondly*, contrary to a widespread misconception about Marx's philosophy of history, contingency for him plays an important role in the unfolding of events in history. In a letter to Kugelmann (1871), commenting on the Paris Commune, Marx emphasizes that

<sup>20</sup> From a purely systematic point of view, agency, organism, and the work of art (although Hegel does not discuss the latter in the logic) belong to the logic of the Concept, where the categories of "purpose" and "life" are being addressed. Absolute necessity in the logic of essence is a "blind" necessity that has not yet been superseded in the freedom of the Concept.

<sup>21</sup> Lukács (1948: 50).



World history would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favorable chances. It would, on the other hand, be of a very mystical nature, if "accidents" [Zufälligkeiten] played no part. These accidents themselves fall naturally into the general course of development and are compensated again by other accidents. But acceleration and delay are very dependent upon such "accidents," which include the "accident" of the character of those who first stand at the head of the movement. (MEW 33: 209, MECW 44: 136–37, Marx's emphases)

According to Marx, therefore, it is not the case that in history there are simply some laws that exist independently from the contingencies. Rather, the necessity obtains through taking up the contingent events and transforming them into its process. Such contingencies affect the general process of necessity, inasmuch as they can accelerate or delay this process. Therefore, as the contingent events are "effective" in the process of necessity, they become in fact necessary for it.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, let us conclude our exposition of the logic in this chapter with a brief discussion of how Hegel's conception of contingency feeds into his conception of totality, as discussed in Chapter 3. Recall that in contrast to Spinoza's inert and unchanging substance, Hegel's totality is essentially dynamic. The process of the constitution of totality begins, so to speak, with the contingent individuals and their interrelations. Although the power of totality imposes some severe structural limitations on the contingent individuals, nonetheless, within those limits, the totality is responsive to the behavior of individuals and accordingly changes its course. In contrast to Spinoza's totality, whose logic is fixed *sub specie aeternitatis*, Hegel's totality enjoys a certain degree of plasticity and fluidity. Within the framework of the logic of essence, the contingent events and phenomena that might first appear to be alien to the logic of totality (contingency as "brute externality") are soon taken by the totality as its condition ("relative contingency"), and are finally successfully dragged into the coercive machinery of the totality ("absolute contingency"). Contingency, that is, does not function as a limitation for the necessity of totality, but in fact complements it. Moreover, that the totality in the logic of essence does not lose ground in the face of new accidental phenomena shows that its power

<sup>22</sup> To give another example: Hegel's doctrine of absolute necessity and absolute contingency, once applied to the logic of agency, shows why Hegel is not in favor of abstract Kantian cosmopolitanism. For cosmopolitans, because the fact of being born in a specific country, say Iran, is contingent, it should not play any role in one's moral behavior. From a Hegelian standpoint, in my reading, the "absolute necessity" of moral action can only obtain when it incorporates the "absolute contingency" of the unchosen, given conditions (being born in Iran). This again testifies to the centrality of "actuality" in Hegel's philosophy, and the necessity that obtains through it.

is in fact resilient. The totality has the capacity to adapt itself to new situations, maintains its identity across different circumstances, and can even use what may appear at first sight as a potential challenge to it as a means to the eventual reinforcement of its power. The resilience of the power of the totality in the logic of essence matches with the resilience of the power of capital in capitalism. Let us now turn to Marx to see how necessity and contingency relate to each other in capitalism.

#### 5.4 . . . and in Capitalism

##### 5.4.1 *Individuals as the “Plaything of Alien Powers”*

Capitalism as a system of generalized commodity production is characterized by a distinct mode of relation between individuals, one which may be called, following Tony Smith, “dissociated sociality.” In capitalism, the units of production are private enterprises that are dissociated from each other. They are also dissociated from – or, in Marx’s language, “mutually indifferent” to – consumers. The private units of production are free to decide what they want to produce and how much of it. The law of private property ensures that the owners of the units of production remain the sole sovereign of what they possess; nobody is to interfere with their decisions.<sup>23</sup>

And yet the units of production do not produce for their own consumption. Within a system of generalized commodity production, they have to produce commodities – namely, goods that must be sold to others. As the producers are dissociated from each other and from the consumers, there is always an ineliminable chance that the commodities will not be able to be sold on the market. Or it might be the case that the commodities are sold with a higher or lower value than they were purported to have (when the demand on the market proves to be respectively higher or lower than expected). The constant disproportion between supply and demand in the market implies that capitalism is always ridden with contingencies. However, this does not entail that there are no economic laws. Rather, in capitalism the necessary laws obtain through and in the midst of contingencies. From his youth Marx recognized that the market contingencies are inherent to capitalism. Let us consider this remarkable passage from his posthumously published *Comment on James Mill* (1844):

<sup>23</sup> See Smith (2017: 80–81) and also Rubin (2008 [1923]: 7ff).

Mill commits the mistake – like the school of Ricardo in general – of stating the *abstract law* without the change or continual supersession of this law through which alone it comes into being. If it is a *constant law* that, for example, the cost of production in the last instance – or rather when demand and supply are in equilibrium which occurs sporadically, contingently – determines the price (value), it is just as much a *constant law* that they are not in equilibrium, and that therefore value and cost of production stand in no necessary relationship. Indeed, there is always only a momentary equilibrium of demand and supply owing to the previous fluctuations of demand and supply, owing to the disproportion between cost of production and exchange-value, just as this fluctuation and this disproportion likewise again follow the momentary state of equilibrium. This *actual* movement, of which that law is only an abstract, contingent and one-sided moment, is made by recent political economy into something accidental and insensational. Why? Because in the acute and precise formulas to which they reduce political economy, the basic formula, if they wished to express that movement abstractly, would have to be: In political economy, law is determined by its opposite, absence of law. [Das Gesetz ist in der Nationalökonomie durch sein Gegenteil, die Gesetzlosigkeit, bestimmt.] (MEW 40: 445, MECW 3: 211)

According to Ricardo's (and James Mill's) labor-theory of value, it is the labor spent in the production of commodities (i.e., the cost of production) that determines their value (or price). This means that the market does not have any effect on the value of commodities. Ricardo could propose this theory since he simply *presupposed* that in the market supply and demand always match, thus rendering the market irrelevant to the value of commodities. Marx, however, holds that this presupposition is exactly what is problematic in Ricardo – since in capitalism, in which by definition there is no *ex ante* coordination between producers and consumers across society, supply and demand never match, or match only sporadically. Therefore, according to Marx, the Ricardian law which purports to grasp the necessity of the movement of prices, in effect makes the law contingent – namely, contingent upon a matching of supply and demand that only sporadically obtains.

Now, Marx accepts the labor theory of value, but he holds that in capitalism there is a constitutive role for the market in the economy. Indeed, as he later explicitly proposes, the value produced can only get validated or “actualized” [verwirklicht] through the market. That the market is essential to Marx's theory of value means that for Marx contingency is indispensable – since the market economy is always rampant with “fluctuations” and “disproportions” between supply and demand.

From a logical point of view, and consistently with the Newtonian rationality which was then predominant, Ricardo conceives of law as a necessity which excludes contingency. By contrast, Marx, inspired by Hegelian rationality, regards necessity and contingency as standing in a dialectical interrelation, such that necessity is actualized only through contingency.<sup>24</sup>

Going into the details of Marx's economic theory would take us too far from our proper subject, and thus my account is inevitably brief and involves simplification. Marx distinguishes between the "real value" (or simply "value") of commodities and their "market value" (i.e., "price"). The former is defined through the cost of production, but the latter obtains through the contingencies of supply and demand in the market. As Marx emphasized years later in the *Grundrisse*,

The *market value* is always different, is always below or above the [real] value of a commodity. Market value equates itself with real value by means of its constant oscillations, never by means of an equation with real value as if the latter were a third party, but rather by means of constant non-equation of itself (as Hegel would say, not by way of abstract identity, but by constant negation of the negation, i.e. of itself as negation of real value.) (MEW 42: 72, G: 137)

For Marx the real value is not observable in the market; it is rather an undergirding necessity that constrains the limits of the observable price of commodities. The real value, that is, functions as "the driving force and the moving principle of the oscillations which commodity prices run through," i.e., as "the law of the motion" of the prices (MEW 42: 72, G: 137). In *Capital* Marx further clarifies that "the quantitative incongruity between price and magnitude of value" or "the deviation of the former from the latter" is emphatically "no defect" of the price-form,

but, on the contrary, it makes this form the adequate one for a mode of production whose laws can only assert themselves as blindly operating averages between constant irregularities [worin sich die Regel nur als

<sup>24</sup> In his *Karl Marx: The Burden of Reason (Why Marx Rejected Politics and the Market)*, Allan Megill, while quoting the above passage, argues that the main reason why Marx rejected the market economy is this: because there is always contingency and chance in the market, "the market is not rationally understandable," therefore, "it is not accessible to scientific understanding" (Megill 2002: 164). Megill concedes that Marx drew his demand for rationality mainly from Hegel, yet he takes Hegel to be a "necessitarian" thinker who holds that "a truly rational knowledge is a necessary knowledge in which nothing is contingent" (Megill 2002: 162). Megill's argument is simply wrong, since it is based on a wrong conception of Hegel. Even if we grant that Marx rejected the market economy because the market fails to be rational, it is very odd to reduce Marx's demand for rationality merely to a "scientific understanding" of the world. In accord with Hegelian philosophy, Marx's conception of rationality is broad, and includes the moral and ethical dimensions.

blindwirkendes Durchschnittsgesetz der Regellosigkeit durchsetzen kann]. (MEW 23: 117, C I: 196)<sup>25</sup>

The idea that the necessity of the economy occurs through the contingent fluctuations of the market – considered in abstraction and on its own – does not seem to be an adequate reason why Marx rejected the market. Indeed, even Friedrich von Hayek – Marx's twentieth-century archenemy – believes that a "spontaneous order" in the economy evolves out of the contingent decisions of individuals. However, if we position this idea within the overall structure of Marx's thought, it becomes clear why it has a significantly critical bent. For Marx, commodities in capitalism are not inert objects. Rather, they are social institutions that exert power over individuals, coercing individuals to abide by their logic. Individuals are purportedly self-determining, but in effect it is the products of their labor that determine them. As the logic of the commodities is the logic of contingency and of a necessity that comes through it, individuals in capitalism inevitably become a "plaything of alien powers" [Spielball fremder Mächte] (MEW 1: 355, MECW 3: 155).<sup>26</sup> Whereas Hayek thinks that the market is "the most efficient" way of organizing the economy, Marx argues that the market reinforces the relation of domination between capital and labor, tends to render masses of people unemployed, and is necessarily fraught with economic crises that could destroy the livelihood of millions of people. It is in this framework that Marx rejects the logic of the market, and argues in favor of a social order in which individuals do not allow social production and reproduction to be determined by chance, but rather through self-awareness and transparency.

For Hegel, as we recall, the form of necessity that obtains through fluctuations of contingency is best exemplified in the realm of nature ("Nature exhibits no freedom in its existence, but only *necessity* and *contingency*" (EN §248)). For Marx, the capitalist economy is problematic exactly because it reduces human beings to "natural" objects that are subject to the dialectic of contingency and blind necessity. In his early *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy* (1844) – a text that had

<sup>25</sup> See also Marx's letter to Kugelmann, July 11, 1868: "The point of civil society is precisely that, a priori, no conscious social regulation of production takes place. What is rational and necessary by nature asserts itself only as a blindly operating average" (MEW 32: 553, MECW 43: 69).

<sup>26</sup> G. A. Cohen in *Why Not Socialism?* argues that the market is a huge casino and the economic status of individuals, for the most part, is the result of pure chance. However, in contrast to normal casinos, the market is a casino that encompasses everything, and thus denies individuals the option of choosing not to enter (Cohen 2009: 32–33). That is to say, individuals in capitalism are *necessarily* forced to be at the mercy of *chance*.

a tremendous effect on the young Marx, drawing him into political economy – Engels argues that the law in the capitalist economy is “purely a law of nature, and not a law of the Spirit [Geist]” (MEW 1: 514, MECW 3: 433). For Engels, capitalist economic laws are not the result of conscious decisions of individuals, or of society as a whole, but like the laws of nature have their own independent logic. These so-called artificial laws develop into periodic crises that are not preventable, and are indeed more harmful than the periodic “natural” epidemics of plague that haunted Europe in the Middle Ages. Engels writes

What are we to think of a law which can only assert itself through periodic upheavals? It is certainly a natural law based on the unconsciousness of the participants. If the producers as such knew how much the consumers required, if they were to organize production, if they were to share it out amongst themselves, then the fluctuations of competition and its tendency to crisis would be impossible. Carry on production consciously as human beings – not as dispersed atoms without consciousness of your species – and you have overcome all these artificial and untenable antitheses. But as long as you continue to produce in the present unconscious, thoughtless manner, at the command of chance [Herrschaft des Zufalls] – for just so long trade crises will remain. (MEW 1: 515, MECW 3: 434)<sup>27</sup>

#### 5.4.2 *Anarchy in the Market and Despotism in the Workplace*

In order to illustrate how the dialectic of necessity and contingency in the market actually reflects back on individuals and determines their lives, I would like to discuss one instance of Marx’s concrete analysis of capitalism, namely how in capitalism the “anarchy” of the market and the “despotism” in the workplace mutually condition each other. Marx elaborates on this issue in *Capital* in the course of his analysis of the distinction between the “division of labor in manufacture” and the “division of labor in society,” where he contrasts his conception with Adam Smith’s.

According to Smith, Marx reports, the division of labor in society and the division of labor in the factory are of the same kind: they differ only in degree. For Smith, the difference between the two is only “subjective,” that is, it “exists merely for the observer.” In the case of the division of labor in the factory it is possible to observe all the different operations in one spot at a glance, whereas this is not possible in the division of labor in society. Against Smith, Marx argues that the two are *qualitatively* different. In the

<sup>27</sup> See also MEW 21: 169–70, MECW 26: 273–74.

case of the division of labor in the factory, it is only the end product that is a commodity. Thus, the interconnection of different forms of labor in the factory is maintained by a single capital that organizes the workplace. In contrast, the division of labor in society is maintained through the exchange of commodities. Here, what relates different forms of labor is not a conscious plan of the capitalist, but the purchase and sale of the products of different branches of industry in the market across society:

The division of labor within manufacture presupposes a concentration of the means of production in the hands of one capitalist; the division of labor within society presupposes a dispersal of those means among many independent producers of commodities. While, within the workshop, the iron law of proportionality subjects definite numbers of workers to definite functions, in the society outside the workshop, the play of chance [Zufall] and caprice [Willkür] results in a motley pattern of distribution of the producers and their means of production among the various branches of social labor. (MEW 23: 376, C I: 476)

Therefore, according to Marx, the form of necessity that is at work in the division of labor in the factory is distinct from the form of necessity in the division of labor in society. While the former obtains through “a planned and regulated a priori system,” the latter is “an a posteriori necessity imposed by nature, controlling the unregulated caprice of the producers, and perceptible in the fluctuations of the barometer of the market prices” (MEW 23: 376, C I: 476). That is, the division of labor in society is “a posteriori” since it is derived from the contingencies of the market.

According to Marx, the two forms of the division of labor are inter-related. The individual capitalist under the “coercive laws of competition” in the market is forced to exert an “undisputed authority” over the workers in factory. The capitalist has no choice except to organize the workplace in such a way that it maximizes efficiency. Thus, on the one hand, in order to expedite the process of production, the worker must be assigned a tiny and repetitive task which makes him an appendage of the machine, thereby divesting him of his humanity; and, on the other hand, the worker must be made to work as hard as his physiology allows. In the capitalist mode of production, Marx concludes, “anarchy in the social division of labor and despotism in the manufacturing division of labor mutually condition each other” (MEW 23: 377, C I: 477).

The point of Marx's analysis is to attack the ideology of the free market – the ideology that holds that any planned economy, in restricting choices, hinders the freedom of individuals. In fact, it is the unregulated “free”

market, reflected back into the workplace, that renders the worker systematically subject to the despotism of the capitalist.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps Marx was too optimistic to think that this despotism remains limited to the workplace, since the current neoliberal constellation, with its ideology of “flexible labor arrangements,” has proved that this despotism can be extended beyond the workplace and into the home.

### 5.4.3 *The Resilience of the Power of Capital*

Let us now zoom out to see some wider implications of Marx’s dialectical conception of necessity and contingency. We saw that for Hegel the power of the totality is resilient, in the sense that it can adapt itself to a wide range of contingent phenomena. Influenced by Hegel, Marx was also keenly aware how the power of the totality of capital is highly resilient. Perhaps nowhere is this more salient than in his critique of Lassalle’s so-called iron law of wages.

According to Lassalle, the natural growth of the population necessarily brings down the wage of workers to a bare minimum required for subsistence. In contrast, Marx believes that in capitalism, only the upper and lower limits of the wage are necessarily fixed – the upper limit being that which does not seriously impede the accumulation of capital, and the lower limit being the minimum subsistence wage. Between these two, there is a wide scope within which the actual wage can materialize. That is, the determination of the wage in actuality depends on the interplay of various contingent factors, i.e., factors that cannot be determined solely on the basis of the internal logic of capital. These factors include “the level of civilization attained by a country,” which determines the needs and expectations of the workers (MEW 23: 185, C I: 275), as well as the actual power of workers’ organizations, which determines their bargaining power vis-à-vis the capitalists.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> In a characteristic vent of anger, Marx concludes that “The same bourgeois consciousness which celebrates the division of labor in the workshop, the lifelong annexation of the worker to a partial operation, and his complete subjection to capital, as an organization of labor that increases its productive power, denounces with equal vigor every conscious attempt to control and regulate the process of production socially, as an inroad upon such sacred things as the rights of property, freedom and the self-determining ‘genius’ of the individual capitalist” (MEW 23: 379, C I: 477).

<sup>29</sup> See the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (MEW 19: 24–5, MECW 24: 91–2), and also Engels’s letter to Bebel, in which it is stated “in ‘Capital’ Marx has amply demonstrated that the laws governing wages are very complex, that, according to circumstances, now this law, now that, holds sway, that they are therefore by no means iron but are, on the contrary, exceedingly elastic” (MEW 19: 5, MECW 24: 69). See also Lukács (GLW 13: 148).



Moreover, in the all-important Chapter 25 of *Capital: Volume One*, which serves as the culmination of the theory proposed in the book, Marx shows in great detail how the logic of capital is extremely flexible. Here Marx describes two basic models of capital accumulation. In the first model, capital accumulation is accompanied by a proportional increase in its variable part. In this situation, the growth of capital translates into a growth of demand for workers, and consequently a rise of wages, or a sinking of the unemployment rate, or any combination of them. It is obvious that with a wage increase, the workers' consumption fund, "the circle of their enjoyments," expands. But Marx is clear that even with the improvement of the quality of life of the workers as consumers, the power of capital remains firmly in place. "These things no more abolish the exploitation of the wage-laborer, and his situation of dependence, than do better clothing, food and treatment, and larger *peculium*, in the case of the slave" (MEW 23: 646, C I: 769).

In the second model, the accumulation of capital is accompanied by more investment in technological and organizational development. The fund for investment in technological development is secured not only by the regular process of growth, which Marx calls the "concentration" of capital; the necessary fund is also procured by the much more rapid process of "centralization" of capital, which obtains when less profitable capitals are bought by larger capitals, instantly increasing the available capital in one hand. Ultimately, the introduction of new labor-saving technology proportionally lowers the demand for workers, as a result of which wages may even sink. The economic growth in the second model, therefore, is perfectly consistent with the worsening of the situation of the workers.

Going into the detail of Marx's two economic models is beyond the remit of the present work.<sup>30</sup> What is important for our purpose is to

<sup>30</sup> That Marx in *Capital* writes about varieties of capital accumulation shows that the so-called immiseration thesis – namely, the view that with the advancement of capitalism, the real wage of workers inevitably and progressively sinks to the point of their eventual pauperism – cannot be his considered view. The immiseration thesis is usually ascribed to Marx on the basis of a famous passage of *Capital: Volume One*: "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time, accumulation of misery, the torment of labor, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation at the opposite pole." However, in interpreting this passage, two important qualifications must be noted. First, even here Marx is not primarily concerned with the real wages of the workers, but with the progressive deepening of the relation of dependence of workers on capital. Thus, in the same passage, as if preempting later misunderstandings, he notes, "in proportion as capital accumulates, the situation of the worker, *be his payment high or low*, must grow worse" (MEW 23: 675, C I: 799, emphasis added; see also Heinrich 1999: 322ff). Secondly, and more importantly, even if Marx proposes an immiseration thesis, he does so under strict methodological constraints. For one thing, in order to set out the immanent logic of capital, Marx in *Capital* does not take into account

emphasize the extreme resilience of the power of capital. Capital is responsive, firstly, to the problems that arise from its internal function. The constant “cycle (interrupted by smaller oscillations) of periods of average activity, production at high pressure, crisis, and stagnation” shows how capital is alive, and can use the problems it faces to initiate a new phase of accumulation (MEW 23: 661, C I: 785). In Marx’s own words, “the mechanism of the capitalist production process removes the very obstacles it temporarily creates” (MEW 23: 648, C I: 770). Secondly, capital is responsive to the contingencies that are not primarily economical in origin. Ideological developments, or cultural and political forces, which may initially seem to be restrictive of the process of accumulation, might prove in the long run to reinforce the sovereignty of capital. In *Capital*, Marx describes how the legal limitation on the working-day in nineteenth-century England – no doubt a huge political triumph as it was – eventually spurred the capitalists to develop new, more productive, labor-saving machinery, which in the end only deepened the dependency of the workers on capital (MEW 23: 431ff, C I: 533ff).

We must grasp, then, that the power of capital is compatible with a wide range of different historical, cultural and political backgrounds. In response to changing, contingent conditions, the extant regime of accumulation can morph into another regime, while remaining capitalist all the same. The historical transformation of capitalism from laissez-faire to welfare state or developmentalist, and hence to the neoliberal regime of accumulation, testifies to the resilience of the power of capital, and correspondingly the deep difficulties any political platform which aims to combat the sovereignty of capital has to overcome.

### 5.5 The Illusion and Contingency of Freedom

“Contingency,” according to Adorno, is “the shape of freedom under the spell” of totality (GS 6: 338). In this section, my aim is to flesh out Adorno’s undeveloped insight by discussing the conception of freedom that operates

the effects of labor regulations by the state, as well as possible reforms that might transpire within capitalism as a result of class struggle. The immiseration of workers in the global south in the current neoliberal regime of deregulation of labor only empirically testifies to Marx’s theoretical account. For another thing, in the first volume, where this account occurs, Marx systematically develops the determinations of the process of production alone. In the second volume, where the circulation process is discussed, the picture inevitably has to change. As the commodities produced must be sold in the circulation process, there must always be adequate “effective demand,” which implies that the wage of the workers must not sink too low, lest the process of accumulation be impeded; see Harvey (2010: 282ff).

(1) in the logic of essence and (2) in capitalism. This kind of freedom, which is characterized by contingency, Hegel calls “formal”; and Marx takes up the same word to describe the status of freedom in capitalism. Importantly, such freedom is illusory, as it functions solely as a moment of the necessity of totality.

### 5.5.1 . . . in the Logic of Essence

A good point of departure is to consider the distinction between “negative” and “positive” freedom that Isaiah Berlin (re-)introduced in social and political philosophy. Negative freedom is the *absence* of obstacles to one’s action. It is the freedom of *non-interference*. One is free in the negative sense insofar as one is left in a space within which one can exercise one’s freedom. In contrast, positive freedom is defined in terms of “self-actualization” or “self-determination.” One is free in the positive sense insofar one is able to act in such a way as to realize one’s fundamental purposes and values, and insofar as one can take control of one’s own life in a significant way (Berlin 2002 [1969]).

It is clear that the freedom that obtains in the logic of essence is merely negative. Recall that in the logic of essence the individual, qua contingency, gains its individuality through *lack* of determination. The individual in essence is not a fully determinate or substantive individual; rather, it becomes individual only through *escaping* from the network of relationality. However, it is not by virtue of itself that the individual can escape such total determination; rather, it is the totality which determines or “posits” the individual as not-fully-determinate and contingent. The totality of substance withholding from the total determination of individuals gives the individuals some leeway for self-determination, and this leeway is conceived by them as freedom. This leeway is only limited, however, since the contingent always exists not for itself but for the sake of necessity.<sup>31</sup>

Calling Hegel’s “formal freedom” “negative” is illuminating in that it captures its inherent indeterminacy; yet it can potentially be misleading. In liberal political philosophy, with its atomistic ontology, negative freedom is real: it is a property of individuals and there is nothing illusory about it. In contrast, in the logic of essence, where there is always an absolute primacy of totality over individuals, negative freedom is illusory; it exists, but only as a moment of the totality of essence.

<sup>31</sup> From the logical point of view, “positive freedom” obtains only in the logic of the Concept, where individuals are in fact self-determining. See the Conclusion for a brief discussion.

For Hegel, freedom qua randomness and contingency is best exemplified in the realm of nature, where individuals are thoroughly subject to the dialectic of necessity and contingency. In nature, Hegel tells us, contingency has its “free sway” [freies Ergehen], since it is not possible for individuals as individuals to be conceptually determined (EL §145Z). Although it is true that each individual in a species is unique in its shape and biological make-up, it nonetheless remains an individual *of* that particular species. The diversity of individuals of a species, precisely speaking, is not genuine, since at bottom all of them bear the same structure. Hegel uses the spatial metaphor of “surface of nature” to describe the locus of contingency: individuals are free on the surface of nature to be what they are, but this does not affect the deeper necessary regularities or laws of nature. The totality of species is

absolute power just because it can freely abandon [frei entlassen] its difference to the shape of self-subsistent diversity, external necessity, contingency, caprice, opinion, which however must not be taken for more than the abstract aspect of *nothingness* [Nichtigkeit]. (WL II: 283, SL: 608)<sup>32</sup>

The diversity of species amounts to “nothingness,” Hegel emphasizes, since such diversity remains “without concept” – not only because it is impossible *for us* to understand this diversity, but because diversity *objectively* obtains through lack of determination.

Hegel appears to take the view that the freedom that obtains in the market resembles the formal freedom that operates in nature. In buying one commodity rather than another commodity, I might think that I am free; yet this freedom is an illusion since it solely contributes to the perpetuation of the laws of market economy. In the *Philosophy of Right*,

<sup>32</sup> The “frei entlassen” (free abandoning) of individuals in the logic of essence must be distinguished from the “Gewährenlassen” (allowing to be free) accorded to individuals in the logic of the Concept. In order to understand the distinction, the following passage from Hegel’s Nuremberg period is helpful: “God is, according to the moments of his essence: (1) absolutely holy, inasmuch as he is in himself the purely universal essence; he is (2) absolute power, inasmuch as he actualizes the universal and preserves the individual in the universal or is the eternal creator of the universe; he is (3) wisdom, insofar as his power is only holy power; (4) goodness, insofar as he allows the individual in his actual existence to be free [insofern er das Einzelne in seiner Wirklichkeit gewähren läßt]; and (5) justice, insofar as he eternally brings the individual back to the universal” (WW 4: 273–74). In this passage, Hegel identifies the absolute power of the totality (God) with its capacity to contain the individual within itself, which simultaneously allows the individual to be what she is. The key is that the totality is absolutely powerful, yet, at the same time, both good and holy. The identification of the absolute power with goodness distinguishes Hegel’s understanding of God from Spinoza’s, as Majetschak correctly points out (Majetschak 1992: 147). Within the structure of Hegel’s own logic, such attributes as goodness and holiness obtain only within the logic of the Concept, and thus the passage cited can be adequately deciphered only with the resources of the logic of the Concept.

Hegel emphasizes that although in civil society it seems to me that I myself determine my own particularity, nonetheless,

this is nothing but a pure mistake [aber ich bin eigentlich darüber nur im Irrtum], since, while I suppose that I am adhering to the particular, the universal and the necessity of the context remains the primary and essential factor. I am thus altogether on the level of semblance, and while my particularity remains my determining principle, that is, my end, I am thereby serving the universal which in fact retains ultimate power over me. (PR §181Z)

To give an example beyond the realm of economy, consider the basic presupposition of Durkheim's work on suicide. Highly conscious of the significance of what he writes, Durkheim in the introduction to the book emphasizes that "each society is predisposed to contribute to a definite quota of voluntary deaths."<sup>33</sup> Although Durkheim is far from realizing his debt to Hegel, this is a perfect example of the "formal freedom" that obtains in the logic of essence. A particular individual thinks that in voluntarily killing himself he is free, but in fact his freedom is only the result of chance. Through a constellation of factors – the level of social cohesion obtained through such collective enterprises as religion; the unemployment rate, social and economic upheavals and the ensuing disorientation and "anomie" of individuals, etc. – a given society in a given time is *necessarily* predisposed to have a certain number of suicides. In Durkheim's language, this is a "social fact," that exists independently of individuals. If it is not – contingently, randomly – this particular individual that kills himself, another individual would do so.

More generally, Hegel characterizes the freedom of choice (Willkür) by reference to contingency (PR §15). In freedom of choice, the options among which I am allowed to choose are given to me from outside, and I do not have any role in constituting them. My freedom remains contingent because, in a deeper sense, whatever I choose does not belong to me: I could have simply chosen otherwise. In the logic, Hegel characterizes contingency by contradiction, and here he holds that freedom of choice is similarly contradictory (PR §15, EL §145Z). The freedom of choice is contradictory since it is at the same time both grounded and ungrounded. In choosing a given option rather than another one, I take myself to be the *ground* of my own decision, but on further reflection it becomes clear that my decision is *not grounded* on myself, but is in fact determined from

<sup>33</sup> Durkheim (1952 [1897]: I).

without, say, from natural desires that simply happen to me, or from external manipulation, advertisement, etc. Alternatively, the contradiction of choice can be described in terms of the tension between form and content. The content of choice is not generated by the form of the will, which is marked by genuine freedom, but contingently impinges upon it from without, from what is external to what constitutes the form of the will (EL §145Z).<sup>34</sup>

### 5.5.2 ... in Capitalism

We saw in Chapter 1 that, for Marx, freedom in capitalism is an illusion. Marx grants that there is freedom in capitalism; yet he proves that this freedom does not exist for its own sake, but functions as a moment of the structure of domination. Having discussed the dialectic of necessity and contingency in essence, we are now in a better position to understand the precise nature of formal freedom in capitalism. In this section, I discuss four aspects of freedom in capitalism, and explain how they remain illusory.

The first and perhaps most salient aspect of freedom in capitalism is *freedom of consumption*. Especially in our consumerist societies, freedom of consumption appears to be the main reason appealed to in justification of capitalism. Indeed, Marx regards the freedom of consumption as one major point that distinguishes capitalism from precapitalist social orders. In a text that was originally intended to be the last part of *Capital: Volume One*, entitled “Results of the Immediate Process of Production,” Marx writes

The slave receives the means of subsistence he requires in the form of *naturalia* which are fixed both in kind and quantity, i.e., he receives use-values, the free worker receives them in the shape of *money, exchange value*, the abstract social form of wealth. Even though his wage is in fact nothing more than the silver or gold or copper or paper form of the necessary means of subsistence into which it must constantly be dissolved – even though money functions here only as a means of circulation, as a vanishing form of exchange value, that exchange value, abstract wealth, remains in his mind as something more than a particular use-value hedged round with traditional and local restrictions. It is the worker himself who converts the money into

<sup>34</sup> Yeomans offers a helpful discussion of the contradiction of choice (Yeomans 2012: 167ff). Free choice is contradictory, in Yeomans’s language, because “it is the opposition between the fact that the will takes itself to be the locus of responsibility, and yet when the action is given a rationally satisfying ground or explanation the locus of responsibility is ascribed to external factors” (Yeomans 2012: 171). See also Peperzak (2001: 203–7).

whatever use-values he desires; it is he who buys commodities as he wishes and, as the owner of money, as the buyer of goods, he stands in precisely the same relationship to the sellers of goods as any other buyer. Of course, the conditions of his existence – and the limited amount of money he can earn – compel him to make his purchases from a fairly restricted selection of goods. But some variation is possible as we can see from the fact that newspapers, for example, form part of the essential purchases of the urban English worker. He can save or hoard a little. Or else he can squander his money on drink. But even so he acts as a free agent; he must pay his own way; he is responsible to himself for the way he spends his wages. (Results: 1033, Resultate: 115)<sup>35</sup>

According to Marx, the defining feature of capital is the constant drive for valorization of value, and the satisfaction of human needs is only derivative of it. The workers must necessarily spend their money, since it regenerates the process of valorization of value, but what kind of commodity they purchase, from the standpoint of the totality of the economy, is irrelevant and contingent. The workers are thus allowed to exercise their freedom in the realm of consumption, but that freedom simply reinforces the very social relations that subjugate them.

The second aspect is the illusion of *freedom in the labor market*. In capitalism, the worker does not sell his own person, but sells his “labor-power,” and he does so “only for a limited period, for if he were to sell it in a lump, once and for all, he would be selling himself, converting himself from a free man into a slave” (MEW 23: 182, C I: 271). The periodic renewal of the contract gives the worker a sense of freedom, because it may seem to him that he can renounce working for capital whenever he wants. However, as Marx sarcastically observes, this formal freedom *to* sell the labor-power is grounded on, and mediated by, another form of freedom, namely, freedom *from* the means of production. The worker, that is, has “no other commodities for sale, i.e. he is rid of them, he is free of all the objects needed for the realization of his labor-power,” such that he is coerced to sell his labor-power (MEW 23: 183, C I: 273). No matter what

<sup>35</sup> In *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), Marx explains that although there is always some leeway for the worker to spend his wage, nonetheless this leeway is much more restricted than that which seems to be the case: “The consumer is no freer than the producer. His opinion depends on his means and his needs. Both of these are determined by his social position, which itself depends on the whole social organization. True, the worker who buys potatoes and the kept woman who buys lace both follow their respective opinions. But the difference in their opinions is explained by the difference in the positions which they occupy in society, and which themselves are the product of social organization” (MEW 4: 75, MECW 6: 20).

the subjective opinion of the worker is, his freedom remains merely formal, since he has no viable alternative other than selling his labor-power.

Moreover, as I discussed in Chapter 4, due to the universalization of the relations of exchange that occurs through the impersonal medium of money, in capitalism the social relations take on an impersonal character. The individual is not *naturally* bound to any particular estate, guild, or master, and this gives the worker a certain degree of freedom. However, this freedom is only formal, since although the individual worker – if she is lucky – can change the master who dominates her, she must always have *some* master. The relation of domination, that is, remains untouched:

The slave is the property of a particular master, the worker must indeed sell himself to capital, but not to a particular capitalist, and so within certain limitations, he may choose to sell himself to whomever he wishes; and he may also change his master. (Results: 1032, Resultate: 114)

Note how the freedom of the worker is tied up with contingency. In contrast to slave or feudal societies, where there is a necessary bond between the slave or serf and the master, in capitalism the bond between a particular worker and a particular capitalist is contingent. However, the freedom that results through this contingency is an illusion. It seems to the worker that he is independent from the capitalist, but in fact he totally depends upon the class of capitalists:

In ordinary awareness [Vorstellung], individuals are freer under the dominance of the capitalists than before, because their conditions of life are contingent; in actuality, of course, they are less free, because they are to a greater extent governed by objective coercion [sachliche Gewalt]. (MEW 3: 76, MECW 5: 78–79)

The third aspect is concerned with the illusion of the *freedom of exit*. Owing to the impersonal character of social relations in capitalism, the individual worker might be able to climb the social hierarchy, and get into a position that allows her to stop selling her labor-power, or even to become a capitalist herself. This has a strong ideological appeal, as it seems to the worker that if she works hard, or if she is lucky, she will be able to exit the rank of the workers. This is in contrast to feudalism or the slave society, where there is apparently no way for the serf or slave to cease to be what she is. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx concedes the existence of so-called freedom in capitalism, yet he stresses that this freedom remains an illusion:

The determinacy of individuals, which in the former case [i.e., feudalism] appears as a personal restriction of the individual by another, appears in the



latter case [i.e., capitalism] as developed into an objective restriction of the individual by relations independent of him and sufficient unto themselves. Since the single individual cannot strip away his personal determinacy, but may very well overcome and master external relations, his freedom *seems* [*scheint*] to be greater in case 2. A closer examination of these external relations, these conditions, shows, however, that it is impossible for the individuals of a class etc. to overcome them en masse without destroying them. A particular individual may contingently get on top of these relations, but the mass of those under their rule cannot, since their mere existence expresses subordination, the necessary subordination of the mass of individuals. (MEW 42: 97, G: 164, underlining mine)

The inference from the fact that *any* worker can cease to be dependent on capital to the proposition that *all* workers can achieve such independence is based on a fallacy of composition. This is a fallacy that infers a collective case from an individual case, i.e., a fallacy that is based on a local-global confusion.<sup>36</sup> Obviously, in order for capital to function, there must *necessarily* be a class of workers who are coerced to sell their labor-power under the conditions dictated by capital. The reason why a particular individual can rise up in the social hierarchy is *only* because not all individuals can do so. That is, the *contingency* of the so-called freedom of the *individual* worker is mediated and conditioned, to use G. A. Cohen's phrase, by the *necessity* of the "collective unfreedom" of the workers.

The fourth aspect of freedom, finally, is the illusion of an *economic desert*. In capitalism, the workers might believe that they earn what they deserve through their talent, effort, responsibility, and accomplishment. Marx accepts that there is some variation in income in capitalism, such that the individual worker, through hard work, may earn a higher income; yet at the same time he maintains that such an idea of desert is an illusion which results from the objective structure of the economy. I have briefly discussed the distinction between the "value" and "price" of commodities for Marx, which is constitutive of the capitalist economy. The idea of desert has its material foundation in the distinction between the "value" and the "price" of the commodity of "labor-power," which the worker sells. According to Marx, the "value" of labor-power in a given country at a given period of time is more or less given. This "value" depends on the level of civilization as well as the general level of class struggle at that time and place. However, there is necessarily always some oscillation in the "price" of labor-power. An individual worker might be able to sell his labor-power

<sup>36</sup> See Elster (1978: 107–16, 1985: 211).

above or below the given “value” that is defined across the society as a whole. The constant oscillation of the “price” of labor-power around its fixed “value” gives some leeway for individuals to exert their freedom. It may *seem* to the individual that he is actually the one who determines his income, yet in fact his actual income is a *contingency* that is based on the general *necessary* relation between the class of capitalists and the class of workers in society as a whole (Results: 1031–32, Resultate: 113–14).<sup>37</sup>

## 5.6 The Critique of Pluralism

Marx’s critique of the illusion of freedom in the realm of the economy in capitalism is extended by Adorno to a more general critique of pluralism in culture, and it is appropriate to conclude this chapter by a brief discussion of it. Pluralism is of course a pivotal value in liberal political philosophy. It is generally assumed that there should not be any higher power than the individual in determining her own plan of life. The individual, that is, is the sole sovereign of her deeds and must be in a position to develop new tastes and explore new ways of life. In one major brand of liberalism, that of John Stuart Mill, diversity is not only tolerated but actively promoted, to the extent that even “eccentricity” – i.e., being different from others for the sake of being different – is celebrated.<sup>38</sup>

We saw in Chapter 1 that for Adorno one of the ways ideology operates is when a certain value as actualized in a given historical context is confused with the same value in its general form. Adorno, of course, endorses the value of diversity *in general*, and it is more than easy to list passages in his work where he defends what is genuinely different. And yet he argues that diversity *in capitalism* functions as ideology, since it feeds into the deeper relations of domination. In the milieu of exuberant cultural proliferation in the sixties, he was brave enough to tell his students

<sup>37</sup> And, Marx adds, “Furthermore, there is scope for variation (within narrow limits) to allow for the worker’s *individuality*, so that partly as between *different* trades, partly in the *same* one, we find that wages vary depending on the diligence, skill or strength of the worker, and to some extent on his actual personal achievement. Thus the size of his wage packet appears to vary in keeping with the results of his own work and its individual quality . . . Although, as we have shown, the latter do not affect the general relationship between capital and labor, between necessary labor and surplus labor, the result differs for the individual worker, and it does so in accordance with his particular achievement. In the case of the slave, great physical strength or a special talent may enhance his value to a *purchaser*, but this is of no concern to him. It is otherwise with the free worker who is the owner of *his labor-power*” (Results: 1031–32, Resultate: 113–14).

<sup>38</sup> See *On Liberty* (Mill 2003 [1859]: 126–31).

The term "pluralism" is acquiring increasing currency in our own time. It is presumably the ideology describing the centrifugal tendencies of a society that threatens to disintegrate into unreconciled groups under the pressure of its own principles. This is then represented as if it were a state of reconciliation in which people lived together in a harmony while in reality society is full of power struggles. . . . I would like to recommend that you adopt an extremely wary attitude towards the concept of pluralism, which is preached at us on every street corner. To transfigure and ideologize the elements of discontinuity or of social antagonisms in this way is a part of the general ideological trend. (NS-V 13: 140, HF: 95)<sup>39</sup>

According to Adorno, diversity functions as an illusion in capitalism, since it conceals the antagonism or opposition that grounds it. I have discussed the relation of diversity and opposition in detail in Chapter 2, so let us look at the other side of diversity, namely, how diversity as contingency functions as an illusion that contributes to the power of totality of capital.

The totality of capital is defined by the drive towards the valorization of value. From the point of view of capital, the only issue that matters is profit-making. Thus any other issue – what people wear, what kind of personal relationships they get into, what food they consume, what ethnicity they belong to, what religion they have – remains beyond the ken of the determination of capital. In this sense, pluralism or diversity functions as the first form of contingency discussed in this chapter, namely, as "brute externality" to the totality. But, in the second step, it becomes clear that diversity is the very "condition" of the valorization of value. The process of diversification of needs constantly fires up the competition between capitalists to produce commodities to meet the newly formed demands of the market (pluralism as "relative contingency"). Finally, once the process of the commodification of newly formed needs is completed, diversity seamlessly fits into the coercive totality of capital. Now, not only is capital conditioned by pluralism, but it also positively engenders and enhances it (pluralism as "absolute contingency"). We must grasp, then, that in capitalism the process of diversification of life-styles and the intensification of the power of capital coincide. *Pace* liberalism, pluralism is not an abstract, desirable value in any society. On the contrary, in capitalism, it is in fact transformed into a cog in the process of domination.

<sup>39</sup> See also NS-V 12: 198–200.

## *Conclusion*

### *The Failed Transition to the Realm of Genuine Freedom*

And we still revolve around  
the same night, the same day  
the same now. (Ahmad Shamlou)

A main task of the objective logic, consisting of the logic of being and the logic of essence, is to determine the structure of individuals. The logic of being takes individuals to be prior to, and independent from, the relations in which they stand, and proves that, through such independence, individuals are reduced to some undeterminable “bare substrata.” Building upon the failure of the logic of being, the logic of essence adopts the reverse strategy and takes relations to have priority over individuals. However, in the attempt to determine the structure of individuals through relations, the logic of essence ends up by affirming that individuality is indeed an “illusion.”

Hegel discusses the “illusion” of individuality in the logic of essence from various viewpoints. First, individuals seem to be “diverse” from each other; each takes itself to be different from the other, but it turns out that such “diversity” is an illusion, and in fact individuals are determined by the relation of opposition between them. Second, individuals seem to be self-standing on their own, but such self-subsistence is indeed an illusion, and in fact individuals are “accidents” of the totality of “substance.” Third, the constitution of individuals seems to be “contingent”; it seems that each individual can simply be otherwise, but in fact such contingency is governed by the necessity of the law-like regularities of the totality. And, finally, individuals seem to be free and self-determining, but such self-determination is indeed an illusion, and in fact individuals are constituted by the “power” of totality.

The logic of essence expresses the basic structure of social domination in capitalism. First, the labor relations seem to be diverse from each other – some

more humane, some more exploitative – but such “diversity” is an illusion: all relations of labor are based on the relation of “opposition” between capital and labor. Second, it seems that it is the individual capitalist that exerts power over the individual worker, but in fact it is the “totality” or the “structure” of social relations that makes the one powerful and the other powerless. Third, it seems to individuals that they are free, but such freedom is the result of contingency and only contributes to the necessary laws of capital. And, finally, even the most salient freedom that obtains in capitalism, i.e., the freedom of consumption, is an illusion, since it only feeds into the total system of domination.

Yet the important point is that the logic of essence is not the ending point in the exposition of Hegel’s logic. Hegel’s *ultimate* position is not that the coercive structure of the totality repeats itself over and over again without any real prospect of genuine freedom. He is not *ultimately* advocating the view that individuality is an illusion that only functions as a cog within the machinery of domination. Indeed, having conceptualized the inescapability of the coercion of the totality and of the illusion of individuality via the logic of essence, Hegel takes the view that the logic of essence must give way to the logic of the Concept, which is the third and final part of the *Science of Logic*. A proper discussion of the logic of the Concept and how it translates into social and political reality obviously requires another book, but I think I owe the reader some preliminary discussion of it, albeit brief.

In contrast to the logic of essence, where there is only weak, mutilated individuality, in the logic of the Concept Hegel aims to develop a strong, full-fledged conception of individuality. In order to do so, he proposes that individuality must be conceived as a moment within the larger structure of “the Concept.” In contrast to essence that is characterized by relations of coercive power, the Concept is the “realm of freedom,” where relations of “*free love*” and “*boundless blessedness*” reign (WL II: 277, SL: 603). For Hegel, the Concept is composed of three moments of “individuality,” “particularity,” and “universality.” The three moments are not to be conceived as dissociable from each other; they rather strongly interpenetrate. Hegel writes that the Concept is “the totality, since each of the moments is the whole that it is, and each is posited as an undivided unity with it” (EL §160). Each of the moments of individuality, particularity, and universality is the whole, Hegel believes, since each strongly coheres with the other two, and thus in each the two others are contained.

Thus, Hegel conceives of the totality fundamentally in two ways: the totality of essence which is bad and coercive, and the totality of the

Concept which is good and conducive to freedom. The emphasis on the “totality” of the Concept is warranted, since Hegel believes that genuine individuality can never be attained unless it is properly anchored in, and supported by, the moments of particularity and universality. To speak in social and political terms, the deep individuality of an individual can flourish *only* when that individual successfully participates in social institutions that are distinct from comparable social institutions (the moment of “particularity”), and in political institutions that unite that individual with other individuals (the moment of “universality”).<sup>1</sup>

The logic of essence is constituted by a series of progressively determinate dyadic relations of opposition: between essence and semblance; between essence and appearance; between necessity and contingency; and finally, between substance and accident. The logic of the Concept, by contrast, in part unfolds by progressively determinate triadic relations of “inference” [Schluß]. According to Hegel, “the inference is the rational” (EL §181), since the inference is the form through which the unity underlying seemingly distinct moments can be adequately expressed. Explaining Hegel’s various forms of inference is beyond the scope of this Conclusion,<sup>2</sup> yet with evident simplification we can say that the inferential relations obtain between the three moments of universality, particularity, and individuality in a definite order: first, particularity functions as the mediating middle term between individuality and universality; second, individuality functions as the middle term between universality and particularity; and, finally, universality functions as the middle term between particularity and individuality. The three types of inference together constitute an inferential system of mediation, “the cycle of the mediation of its moments” (EL §181), which Hegel calls the Concept. While opposition in the logic of essence is a relation of domination and *subordination*, the circular network that emerges through the series of inferences is characterized by *coordination* between universality, particularity, and individuality.

<sup>1</sup> Thus, Hegel’s *ultimate* position regarding the relation of individuals and totality is distinct from that of Adorno. Adorno seems to entertain the idea that *every* totality is coercive, that there is no such thing as a “good totality,” and that emancipation consists in breaking through the spell of totality. Adorno even goes so far as to claim that dialectics as such is the result of the coercive totality, and that a good society would be devoid of dialectics: “Dialectics is the ontology of the false condition. A right condition would be freed from dialectics, no more system than contradiction” (GS 6: 23). From Hegel’s point of view in the logic, such an appeal to immediate individuality, even as a gesture towards emancipation, is both wrong and unsustainable; rather, individuality can obtain only within the context of a good totality. For Hegel, dialectic remains operative in the good totality, but this dialectic is not essence-logical or oppositional, but Concept-logical or, as we will see in a moment, inferential.

<sup>2</sup> See Lebanidze (2019: 97–138) and Schick (2018: 505–55) for helpful discussions.

And this relation of coordination is Hegel's definition of genuine freedom: freedom is nothing but "*die Verhältnisweise des Begriffs*," i.e. "*the mode of relationship proper to the Concept*" (WL II: 246, SL: 578).

From a social and political point of view, Hegel believes that genuine freedom is already actualized within the modern state. In fact, the modern state is "a hieroglyph of reason" (PR §279Z), and embodies an inferential structure:

[I]n the practical sphere, the state is a system of three inferences: (1) The *individual* (the person) joins itself through its *particularity* (physical and spiritual needs, what becomes the civil society, once they have been further developed for themselves) with the *universal* (the society, justice, law, government). (2) The will, the activity of individuals, is the mediating factor which satisfies the needs in relation to society, the law, and so forth, just as it fulfils and realizes the society, the law, and so forth. (3) But the universal (state, government, law) is the substantial middle [term] in which the individuals and their satisfaction have and acquire their fulfilled reality, mediation, and subsistence. Since the mediation joins each of the determinations with the other extreme, each joins itself precisely in this way together with itself; it produces itself and this production is its self-preservation. – It is only through the nature of this joining-together, through this triad of syllogisms with the same *terminis*, that a whole is truly understood in its organization. (EL §198)

According to Hegel, in a well-functioning free state, the three moments of individuality, particularity, and universality are in harmony with each other, and each positively contributes to the others. First, the moment of particularity, consisting of the professional organizations (or in Hegel's now out-of-date language, "corporations") and civil associations, helps the concerns of individuals be translated into the universal political processes. Second, the particular social institutions and the universal political institutions are neither petrified nor corrosively coercive on individuals (as is the case in the logic of essence); rather, they respond to and are transformed by the free action of individuals. Third, and most importantly, the universal political processes and institutions provide the necessary background conditions for the flourishing of particular economic institutions and of the deep individuality of individuals.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Thus in the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel writes, "The principle of modern states has enormous strength and depth because it allows the principle of subjectivity to attain fulfilment in the *self-sufficient extreme* of personal particularity, while at the same time *bringing it back to substantial unity* and so preserving this unity in the principle of subjectivity itself" (PR §260, see also §258). For helpful discussions on what it means that the structure of the state is a system of inferences, see Henrich (1982) and Vieweg (2012: 366ff). Despite his overall reluctance to use the logic, Neuhausser also

To his credit, Hegel does not entertain the wildly romantic idea that the modern state is the best of all possible worlds, where a pre-established harmony between individuality, particularity, and universality reigns. Hegel is well aware that there is always a possibility of conflict and even “collision” between these moments (PR §30). But he thinks that in the modern state these conflicts, rather than being morbidly debilitating, have a positive function. According to Hegel, without some healthy dose of conflict, any well-functioning state sooner or later decays or becomes petrified. Thus, in the logic, he regards the Concept to have “life” and “activity,” which means that the Concept is responsive to the “contradictions” that happen to it, and aims to overcome them. It is this constant cycle of contradictions, struggle for their removal, and “satisfaction” attained by their removal that guarantees the liveliness of the inferential network of universality, particularity, and individuality that the Concept is (EL §204).

Hegel broadly accepts that the realm of the market economy is governed by the categories of the logic of essence. In particular, he seems to think that the sphere of the economy is a totality which functions according to its own blind necessity, which is, to a large extent, impervious to the ethical deliberation of individuals. In his earlier, Jena writings, he even conceives of the sphere of the economy as a “wild animal,” which “moves here and there in a blind and elementary way.”<sup>4</sup> But he is optimistic that the political state is able to tame the wild animal: the state can, and effectively does, regulate the economic sphere in a rational way. As a result of this successful regulation, Hegel thinks that the totality of modern society must be conceived not in terms of the logic of essence, but in terms of the categories of the logic of the Concept. And this is the reason why he takes the very central notion of the *Philosophy of Right* to be freedom, not power (and so he begins the book by explicating the structure of free will in Concept-logical terms, namely, as a harmonious ensemble of the three moments of universality, particularity, and individuality (PR §5 through §7)).<sup>5</sup>

engages in valuable discussion about how the structure of the Concept informs Hegel’s political philosophy (Neuhouser 2000: 40–43, 133–35).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from Lukács (1975 [1948]: 333).

<sup>5</sup> Having substantiated the social import of Hegel’s logic of essence by reference to Marx and Adorno in this book, some final clarification about the relation of Hegel’s own conception of the market in the *Philosophy of Right* and the logic of essence is warranted. Although Hegel by and large uses the categories of the logic of essence to describe the structure of the market (PR §181, §189, EG §532), there is no complete overlap between the two. *First*, while a central category of the logic of essence is opposition, in the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel does not primarily conceive of the economy in oppositional terms. That is, being generally influenced by Adam Smith’s economic theory, he does



For Hegel, two mechanisms are mainly responsible for ensuring that the coercive totality of the market is transformed into the free totality of the state: first, civil associations and professional organizations (“corporations”) mediate between the particular concerns of individuals and the universal concerns of the state. According to Hegel, the members of such professional organizations have a settled disposition to care both for the people they directly represent and at the same time for the general public (PR §302). Second, the “universal estate,” i.e., the government employees and the state officials, administers the concerns of citizens in a nonegoistic way. Although Hegel does not specify in detail the sort of policies that the state through these two mechanisms implements in relation to the economy, it is not difficult to extrapolate them from his more general principles. Such policies may be of the following types: (1) The state provides the necessary background conditions for the realm of the economy to function; it enforces anti-trust and anti-monopoly measures, which ensures that there is viable competition in the market. (2) It provides the necessary background conditions for workers to flourish by enforcing labor laws that prevent them from being over-exploited. (3) It deploys a program of progressive taxation, and aims at partial redistribution of wealth; the redistributive policies can be of different kinds, and can include such measures as poverty-relief, an unemployment wage, or even a “universal basic income.” (4) It protects the spheres of universal concern – such as child care, education, health, the natural habitat, and the arts – from the vagaries of the market.<sup>6</sup>

not see the essentially antagonistic character of civil society in capitalism. *Second*, because Hegel saw the totality of modern society eventually as the embodiment of the logic of the Concept and of freedom, he was forced to conceive of the market as containing elements which would facilitate the desired transition to the realm of freedom. To give an example, although Hegel criticizes the increasingly mechanical, meaningless nature of work in modern society (PR §198, §253), he also regards the sphere of the economy, i.e., “the system of needs,” as a set of mutual relations that is aimed at the satisfactions of needs (PR §199). That is, he does not see with Marx that the main drive of the economy in capitalism is profit-making and that needs are satisfied *only* to the extent that profit-making is satisfied. Overall, we must grasp that in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel’s attitude towards the sphere of the market is ambivalent, and contains both affirmative *and* negative elements. Of course, he needs this ambivalence in order to succeed in his project of rational justification of the bourgeois-capitalist social order, while not sounding too insensitive towards its inherent predicaments. As we will see shortly, Marx fundamentally denies the possibility of the transition to the logic of the Concept in capitalism, which is to say that his account of capitalism has a primarily critical character. Without the transition to and sublation by the logic of the Concept, the logic of essence unequivocally remains, to use Adorno’s phrase, “the ontology of the false condition” [die Ontologie des falschen Zustandes].

<sup>6</sup> For a helpful discussion of the “sublation of civil society in the state” for Hegel, see Vieweg (2012: 378–82).

However – and this is truly unfortunate not only for Hegel’s theory but for us ourselves – as history has testified again and again, such measures cannot be successfully implemented in a capitalist society: when and if they are implemented, they remain extremely precarious, inviting a strong backlash from pro-market forces; or else they become gradually hollowed out, devoid of real content. To speak in logical terms, the supposed transition from the logic of essence to the logic of the Concept cannot possibly transpire in a capitalist market economy, and we remain entrenched in a world of repetition of the logic of essence. From his youth on, Marx was very clear about the failure of such progressive measures administered by the state under capitalism. It is now worthwhile to examine Marx’s views on this point.<sup>7</sup>

In his early unpublished manuscript of 1843, the *Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State*, Marx launches a thoroughgoing, section-by-section critique of Hegel’s conception of the state in the *Philosophy of Right*. A major part of Marx’s argument is directed against a neo-Platonic interpretation of Hegel, according to which the world (and here, the state) is conceived as an emanation of a preexisting reason. This is not a correct interpretation of Hegel – or in any case, it is not an

<sup>7</sup> Before turning to Marx, however, it is appropriate to challenge Michael Theunissen’s influential interpretation of the logic of the Concept. According to Theunissen, the logic of the Concept is to be construed as the realm of “communicative freedom,” by which he means a kind of freedom through which “the one experiences the other not as a limit, but as a condition of his own self-actualization” (Theunissen 1978: 46ff). Theunissen’s interpretation is one-sided, insofar as it seems to take not the inferential totality of the Concept, but the communicative interrelation of two individuals as the primary definition of the logic of the Concept. Contrary to Theunissen, there are both logical and political reasons to posit the primacy of totality even in the logic of the Concept. From the *logical* point of view, it is unclear why, after meticulously developing totality in the second and third parts of the logic of essence, Hegel should suddenly abandon it to re-start the logic from the communicative relation between two individuals. Rather, the more plausible view is that the logic of the Concept transforms or sublates the logic of essence; which means that it preserves the emphasis on totality, while at the same time transforming the bad, coercive totality of essence into a good, free totality. With the good totality of the Concept being settled, the relations of communicative freedom between individuals naturally ensue, but this is logically the result, and not the initial point of departure. (For a further logical critique of Theunissen’s conception of the logic of the Concept as “a philosophy of intersubjectivity,” see Hartmann (1999: 283–84).) From a *political* point of view, it is obvious that in order for relations of communicative freedom between individuals to flourish, there must *first* be the necessary social and political background conditions. That is to say, the totality must allow such communication to be both meaningful and effective. To wit, how can communicative freedom obtain between capitalists and workers, where the relation between the two is essentially power-laden, and the former set the rules of possible communication by which the latter must necessarily abide? For such communicative freedom to be genuine, there must *first* be a transformation of the current coercive totality into a good totality. Shifting the emphasis from totality towards communicative freedom between individuals can even serve as an ideology, I submit, as it proposes that in order for “social pathologies” to disappear, we must focus on inter-individual communicative relations, rather than on properly political questions.

interpretation broached in the current book – and we can disregard this thread of Marx’s criticism altogether. Marx, however, makes another set of criticisms that are highly valuable. These criticisms are concerned with Hegel’s conception of the relation between civil society and state, and, more generally, Hegel’s conception of politics. The general thrust of Marx’s argument is to show that the capitalist state is indeed a “pseudo-universal,” that it embodies an “illusory universality” (MEW 1: 253, MECW 3: 50).

According to Marx, the two institutions that Hegel believes will effect the transition from the realm of the market to the realm of the state – i.e., the state officials (or, in Marx’s terminology, the “bureaucracy”) and the “corporations” – necessarily fail to deliver on their task. Marx reiterates Hegel’s diagnosis of the realm of the market as “the field of conflict in which the private interest of each individual comes up against that of everyone else” (PR §289), but thinks that Hegel is unduly optimistic that, upon entering the realm of the state, this war of all against all can be left behind. Hegel holds that because the members of the bureaucracy do not need to earn their livelihoods personally and are instead paid by the government, they naturally tend to be concerned about the universal interests of people (PR §205). According to Marx, this is only an empty moral wish, and in fact there is no reason to hold that the government employees and the bureaucracy are of a different mold than the rest of the population. In fact, given the depth of commercial culture prevalent in capitalism, “for the individual bureaucrat, the state objective turns into his private objective, into a *chasing after higher posts, the making of a career*” (MEW 1: 249, MECW 3: 47). That is to say, instead of representing the universal, the members of the bureaucracy (i.e., the state officials) coopt the illusory universality to further their own private ends.

Similarly, Marx attacks Hegel’s optimism regarding the function of the professional organizations or “corporations.” Hegel thinks that the members of professional organizations are able to translate the shared egoism of their members into matters of genuinely universal concern. In contrast, Marx holds that, rather than successfully mediating between the particular and the universal, the corporations remain a “hotchpotch” burdened with various sorts of practical contradiction. Marx seems to argue that the members of corporations get their legitimacy and approval from the particular people they represent, and thus are forced to represent their particular concerns, while at the same time being piously required to care about the universal. The members of the corporations

have the “illusion” that they aim to achieve the universal. However, in fact the function of corporations in the state is nothing but the mirror-image of the war of all against all in the market. Out of this higher-order battlefield, no genuine universality (of the sort Hegel advocates in the logic of the Concept) would ensue, since in practice each corporation aims to use the public resources for its own sake.<sup>8</sup>

More importantly, professional organizations represent the people of their own profession; so what about, to use a contemporary term, the “precariat,” i.e., those who have only a precarious job and are forced to change it all the time? How can they be counted as “insiders” in a profession so as to be able to get a stable and sufficient representation? And, more acutely, what about those who do not have any profession, i.e., the unemployed, and especially the permanently unemployed? Hegel is aware of the latter problem and touches on it in his discussion of the “rabble” in the *Philosophy of Right* (PR §244). But according to Marx, Hegel does not take his own finding seriously enough. The unemployed, even if they get a wage from the welfare state, do not belong to any corporation – they cannot “lobby” for their interests – and inevitably remain under-represented or entirely unrepresented in the political process.

Indeed, according to Marx, the problem of lack of representation runs much deeper, and affects not only the precariat or the unemployed, but each and every worker. Marx writes that “*lack of property* and the *estate of direct labor*, of concrete labor, form not so much an estate of civil society as the ground upon which its circles rest and move” (MEW 1: 284, MECW 3: 80). While the bakeries in London, I presume, might have their own professional organization, these organizations represent only the owners of the bakeries, not their workers, who evidently outnumber the owners. The workers form the very ground of the realm of the economy, but are systematically excluded from the process of representation via corporations. At this early stage, Marx is vaguely expressing a point that he is later able to articulate both clearly and forcefully. The worker in the bakery, in terms of her structural position, is much closer to the worker in the textile industry than to her direct employer in the

<sup>8</sup> As Marx vividly puts it, “As if a man were to step between two fighting men and then again one of the fighting men were to step between the mediator and the fighting man. It is the story of the man and his wife who fought, and the doctor who wanted to step between them as mediator, when in turn the wife had to mediate between the doctor and her husband, and the husband between his wife and the doctor” (MEW 1: 292, MECW 3: 87). According to Marx, out of this universal fight, no inferential totality of the good type, i.e., the Concept, can emerge.

bakery. In fact, therefore, the civil society is not divided culturally in terms of estates, as Hegel thought, but economically in terms of classes. Those who own money capital or productive resources, and are able to hire workers to work for them, constitute the class of capitalists, while those who don't have anything but their labor-power to sell comprise the class of workers.

And here to my mind is Marx's most forceful argument for why the state under capitalism cannot be the realm of the universal. In Hegel's conception, the relation between estates is horizontal and devoid of power. It might be the case that some estates are better off than others, but there is no necessary reason which prevents their eventual harmony. However, for Marx, the estates are not the real, objective category. The class line like a surgical blade cuts through every estate and divides the estates from within. And the relation between classes is a relation of opposition and domination. There cannot be any reconciliation or mediation between the two by a higher institution of the state, as the classes are essentially constituted through their very antagonism: "Real extremes cannot be mediated precisely because they are real extremes. Nor do they require mediation, for they are opposed in essence" (MEW 1: 292, MECW 3: 88).<sup>9</sup>

The relation of opposition between capital and labor is one major feature of capitalism. The other major feature, which in fact provides the ground for the former, is the "totality" of capital. We saw in Chapters 3 and 4 how the logic of capital works like a spell, and forces individuals, on pain of perishing, to abide by it. In this coercive totality, the state, including the liberal-democratic state, cannot be autonomous. Rather, its so-called autonomy is structurally limited by the dictates of capital. In order to secure its own revenues, the state is forced to allow the function of capital, and even to positively contribute to it: no valorization of capital, no money for the state to pay its expenses. Moreover, especially now in the "globalized" world where the logic of capital far transcends the boundaries of

<sup>9</sup> Although Marx at this stage of his life apparently thought direct universal suffrage could be a solution for the process of the representation of the excluded (MEW 1: 326–27, MECW 3: 120–21), as historical experience has proved again and again, this is not a workable solution. This is because in the absence of proper mechanisms of mediation between civil society and the state, democracy is effectively reduced to intermittent voting after long intervals, a mechanism through which no genuine universality can be formed. In the absence of real "participatory" democracy, it is not difficult to see how the power relations in the realm of the economy seep into the political process: through the media that the economically powerful own, through the political campaigns that the powerful fund, etc. For an excellent treatment of why representative democracy essentially fails in a class-riven society, see Macpherson (1977).

nation-states, the state is always intimidated by the threat of “capital flight.” If politicians, out of truly universal interest, aimed to curtail or weaken the domain of the supremacy of capital – say, by increasing the tax rate or by implementing stricter labor regulations – the capitalists would simply move their capital to where there is minimal or no regulation.<sup>10</sup> That is to say, the severe structural limitations that capital imposes on the state shows that even if and when the state intends to further the universal interest, it is in fact forced to represent the interests of the class of capitalists. In Marx’s diagnosis, under capitalism “political spiritualism can be seen to degenerate into crassest materialism” (MEW 1: 310, MECW 3: 105).

Thus, no matter what the politicians believe about what they are doing or what they are after, they are effectively “entrapped in a network of practical illusions” (MEW 1: 248, MECW 3: 46). They claim to represent the universal interest of people, but in fact the claimed universality is subordinated to the logic of capital, and thus serves the particular interests of the capitalists. Marx conceives of the state as “a self-deceiving, self-contradictory *illusory form*” [eine sich selbst täuschende, eine sich selbst widersprechende Form . . . eine *Scheinform*], a form which must always come into conflict with its real content (MEW 1: 267, MECW 3: 64). The form of the state is the universality, but this form does not receive a content appropriate to it. Rather – and to give a final summary of our discussion – the real content of the state is first of all the private interests of the politicians. Moreover, when the politicians genuinely try to overcome their private concerns, due to structural limitations the universal form is still filled out by the real content of the particular interests of the capitalists and, hence, by the interests of the totality of capital.

Thus, Marx holds that there cannot possibly be any genuine taming of the wild animal of capital by the political process. As long as capitalism persists, we are bound to repeat the logic of essence again and again. The logic of essence is the logic of totality, of opposition, of illusion. It is the logic of the coercive totality which hollows out individuality. It is the logic of opposition, where individuals are defined by antagonism with each other. It is the logic of illusion, where individual freedom is demoted to a moment of coercion by the totality of capital. Contrary to Hegel, no transition to the logic of the Concept, and therefore no genuine

<sup>10</sup> See Tony Smith (1990: 200–205, 2017: 190ff) for helpful discussions of the structural limits that capital imposes on the state.

individuality, is possible within capitalism. Making the transition to a society governed by the inferential totality of the Concept – that is to say, to “an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the development of all” – still remains the unfulfilled task of modernity (MEW 4: 482, MECW 6: 506).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Thus, in my reading, Marx does not think Hegel was wrong to develop a logic of the Concept. Rather, Marx thinks that Hegel was wrong to think that the logic of the Concept is already, or can be, actualized in capitalism. In the following passage from the *Grundrisse*, Marx describes three kinds of social structure, which can be taken roughly to correspond, respectively, to the logic of being, the logic of essence, and the logic of the Concept: “Relations of personal dependence (entirely spontaneous at the outset) are the first social forms, in which human productive capacity develops only to a slight extent and at isolated points. Personal independence founded on objective dependence is the second great form, in which a system of general social metabolism, of universal relations, of all-round needs and universal capacities is formed for the first time. Free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals and on their subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth, is the third stage” (MEW 42: 91, G: 158). The first society is based on atomized individuals, and the second on the totality which confronts the individuals as an alien power. It is only in the future, third, society that genuinely “free individuality” coincides with communal, social relations; this is a society which embodies the inferential totality of the Concept, in which the moments of universality, particularity and individuality are in harmony with each other. See Smith (1990: 205–8), who also defends the view that the logic of the Concept corresponds to the logic of a future, socialist society.

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